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# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

## Monterey, California



## THESIS

### POTENTIAL RUSSIAN NUCLEAR CONTINGENCIES IN THE CAUCASUS: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATO

by

Thomas E. Wagner

June 2000

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

David S. Yost  
Mikhail Tsypkin

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**POTENTIAL RUSSIAN NUCLEAR CONTINGENCIES IN THE CAUCASUS:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR NATO**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS**


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## ABSTRACT

There are three potential Russian nuclear contingencies in the Caucasus that merit analysis: a conflict internal to the Russian Federation; a conflict involving Armenia, Azerbaijan, and/or Georgia; and a conflict involving Turkey. The Caucasus is the region in which it is most plausible that Russia might resort to nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances. This region has been in turmoil since the collapse of the Soviet Union; and the prospects for continued conflict are great, given ethnic tensions and competing strategic ambitions regarding the region's energy resources. Russia faces a gap between its geopolitical ambitions and its conventional military capabilities. Its conventional military forces are in disarray and efforts at reform have been unsuccessful. Many in the Russian military establishment, having been trained under the Soviet nuclear doctrine that upheld the efficacy of limited nuclear weapons employment, now see the limited use of nuclear weapons as a genuine option in regional wars. NATO must deal squarely with this potential problem by formulating options for conflict prevention and, if necessary, for response.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze three possible Russian nuclear contingencies in the Caucasus: a conflict internal to the Russian Federation; a conflict involving Armenia, Azerbaijan and/or Georgia; and a conflict involving Turkey

The thesis considers the evolution of Soviet nuclear doctrine to set the stage for an analysis of the current Russian nuclear doctrine. Soviet nuclear doctrine evolved in historical and ideological circumstances distinct from those of the United States. In its ultimate form, Soviet nuclear doctrine was in fact a warfighting strategy. Deterrence was seen as desirable, but the Soviets refused to be governed by the concept of Mutual Assured Destruction. According to Soviet doctrine, a realistic plan for conducting nuclear war would provide the most effective basis for deterrence.

Russia today faces a widening gap between its ambitions and its capabilities. Its conventional military forces are in disarray, with little prospect of imminent improvement. Attempts at military reform have met with little success due to political disagreements and Russia's continuing economic crisis. At the same time, many Russians still consider their country to be a great power. The only way to preserve this status in military terms is to rely on the nuclear arsenal that Russia inherited from the Soviet Union. The published discussions among Russian military officers and commentators about the drastically lowered nuclear threshold offer cause for alarm. These officers were trained under Soviet doctrine that called for the purposeful use of nuclear weapons at various stages of warfare.

Russia remains politically unstable. The purposes of Vladimir Putin, although he has been popularly elected, remain a mystery. The chances of Russia seeking a military



confrontation with the West are low. However, Putin faces situations in the Caucasus, including Chechnya, that are still unsettled. If Russia becomes involved militarily in a large-scale Caucasian conflict, and that effort becomes a quagmire, Putin might feel compelled politically to take drastic measures to reverse the situation.

The Caucasus presents the greatest danger for major conflict in the former Soviet Union. Since 1991, the nations of the region have tried to assert their independence, only to be subjected to renewed Russian efforts to re-impose hegemony. Russia has tried to couch its interference in the region in terms of legitimate interests, but its actions have often been undertaken in an underhanded fashion. It has failed to respect the sovereignty of internationally recognized states and has used brutal means to put down insurrections within its own borders.

The 1994-1996 war in Chechnya was a watershed for Russia because it demonstrated just how far Russian power had declined. By resorting to force to subdue the Chechens, Moscow instead demonstrated that the use of the Russian military was no longer a viable option.

The ideal situation in the Caucasus would be one in which the sovereignty of all states is respected and security problems are solved through international cooperative security organizations. Given its continued great power ambitions, Russia is an obstacle to establishing this state of affairs. There are a number of conflicts in the Caucasus – including Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia in Georgia, and Ingushetia and Ossetia in Russia – that the Putin government may attempt to intervene in.

The threat of Russia using nuclear weapons in a regional contingency is a genuine, albeit unlikely, possibility. As long as Russia maintains hegemonic ambitions in

these regions with a military dependent on nuclear weapons, the possibility that one of these hypothetical scenarios may become reality remains. The best option for NATO is to prevent conflict altogether by promoting cooperative security and engagement with Russia. However, the success of such efforts cannot be guaranteed.

Russia's ambitions and its conventional military weakness ensure that the threat of miscalculation regarding the operational and strategic utility of nuclear weapons is by no means trivial. Given the dangers of such an eventuality, NATO must maintain its robust nuclear deterrent and make clear to Russia that it would have nothing to gain from resorting to nuclear weapons use in a regional contingency. The Alliance must make Russia's leaders aware of the extremely detrimental effect that such actions would have on its standing in the world, as well as of the grim political and possible military consequences. These risks must be analyzed and faced squarely if they are to be successfully managed – by prevention, if possible, and by remedial action, if necessary.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this thesis is to advance understanding of Russian nuclear doctrine, particularly with regard to the possibility that it may inform Russian decision-making in a contingency in the Caucasus. The thesis examines the state of Russian military reform and statements by Russian officials, military officers, and commentators regarding the possible employment of nuclear weapons. The political and strategic dynamics of the Caucasus are examined, because this region may be the setting for an armed conflict involving Russia that could lead to nuclear weapons use. The thesis concludes that NATO must find ways to prepare for such an eventuality. Options for conflict prevention in the Caucasus and for political-military responses should Russia employ nuclear weapons in the region must be developed by the Alliance.

### **A. BACKGROUND**

Russia's actions towards the other former Soviet republics, referred to by Russians as the "Near Abroad," raise important issues in terms of U.S. political-military interests and commitments in Eurasia. If the security of the Euro-Atlantic region is indeed indivisible, a view that is espoused by NATO, the fact that certain states are treated as less than sovereign by their powerful neighbor calls this security into question. Russia seems intent on exercising a great deal of influence over several of these states, an ambition that raises a second important issue: the state of the Russian military posture. An increased reliance on nuclear weapons could lead to their employment in contingencies involving the Near Abroad. These nuclear contingencies are especially worrisome because some members of NATO (Poland, Hungary, and Turkey) physically border Near Abroad nations. Bringing Russia into realistic and constructive political and

military relations with the other former Soviet states is one of the West's most important security problems.

Russia's relations with the other former Soviet republics since 1991 have shown significant variations. Initially, the Commonwealth of Independent States was formed. However, views on what this commonwealth should be differed among the participating states. Russia, as the largest nation, but also the one that had lost vast stretches of Soviet territory, sought to keep the new states closely integrated, with common economic and defense policies. In contrast, Ukraine's leaders were anxious to affirm independence from Moscow. Relations between Kyiv and Moscow have been testy, especially dealing with such delicate issues as nuclear weapons and the Black Sea Fleet. Russia has continually sought the protection of ethnic Russians living in the "Near Abroad" states, and this has been an especially sensitive issue in the Baltic states. Belarus has sought to become closer to Moscow, but many Russians fear that it may become a parasitic partner (a fear which speaks volumes about the disastrous state of affairs in Belarus). Russia has also played a major role in the disturbances in Moldova. Relations with the Muslim republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia have been more problematic, notably with the troubles in Nagorno-Karabakh. Chechnya, it is important to note, is internationally recognized as a part of the Russian Federation. The situation in the Caspian Sea Basin is worrisome for several reasons, including the potential spread of Islamic fundamentalism; the region attracts international attention because of its energy resources.

During the same period, Russia's conventional military capability has declined dramatically. The army that was once dreaded by the West showed its ineptness during the disastrous war in Chechnya in 1994-1996. Attempts at military reform have to this

point been unsuccessful, and the Russian military posture has shifted ominously toward greater reliance on nuclear weapons. Events in Chechnya since September 1999 show that Russia will continue to use force to support its definition of state interests, especially in the northern Caucasus. The great concern here is that because Russia's great power aspirations do not match its conventional military capabilities, it may become embroiled in another quagmire, which could in extreme circumstances lead it to use nuclear forces. This eventuality seems to be most plausible in the Caucasus region, given the recent history of open conflict.

To set the scene for an analysis of possible Russian decision-making in a nuclear crisis in the "Near Abroad," this thesis examines the evolution of Soviet nuclear weapons doctrine and its continuity with the subsequent Russian doctrine. Statements and writings by Russian officials and commentators are used to analyze the implications of the new nuclear weapons policy. The thesis also analyzes the possibilities for continued conflict involving Russia in the Caucasus. The implications of these developments for Western security are then examined. It is clear that all states in the Caucasus must be examined separately, because of the disparity in their historical experiences and current situations—economic, political, and military.

The thesis also offers an analysis of courses of action the West might take to help ensure that the Caucasus does not become an area of military conflict between Russia and the Alliance. All actions must ensure that these new nations are left free to pursue their own futures without Russian interference. Encouraging economic recovery and political transformation will help to make these new nations strong and viable. This is not to say that it would be unnatural for these states to have positive and constructive relations with

Russia. However, their internationally recognized independence must be upheld. Russia also must be discouraged from thinking that the use of nuclear weapons would be a real option in contingencies in the Caucasus. Russia is not now a great power and has lost many lands that were under its dominion even in pre-Soviet times. It appears to be a state on the verge of complete chaos, with little immediate hope of emerging as a peer of the West. Much of the country's future will therefore be determined by what happens in Russia itself. The period of uncertainty and instability at hand will require much vigilance on the part of the nations of the Atlantic Alliance, if their security and that of other countries in the Euro-Atlantic region is to be maintained.

Finally, in view of the possibility that Russian nuclear use contingencies could arise in extreme circumstances in the Caucasus, the thesis also examines potential NATO responses. In other words, while preventing such contingencies is imperative, the success of prevention efforts cannot be guaranteed. The United States and its NATO allies must therefore examine response options to be prepared for the eventuality of such crises.

## **B. METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE**

The research methodology used in the thesis consists of an analysis of primary and secondary sources. Statements by Russian officials and analysts and authoritative articulations of Russian military doctrine are analyzed as primary sources. Scholarly articles by Russian and Western experts are used as secondary sources. Various electronic media are utilized, including Internet resources such as Lexis-Nexis, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, and other websites dedicated to Russian affairs. Scholarly journals and books written by leading experts in the field are also used.

Chapter II examines the evolution of Soviet nuclear doctrine. This examination focuses on the ideological and historical underpinnings of Soviet nuclear doctrine and the historical evolution of this doctrine from Stalin through Gorbachev. Special attention is given to the Soviet views on deterrence, escalation and warfighting. This establishes the background for an analysis of current Russian nuclear doctrine.

Chapter III assesses the state of the Russian military since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This includes an examination of the precipitous decline of Russia's conventional military capability and efforts at military reform. The change in Russia's nuclear posture is analyzed. Statements by Russian political officials and Russian officers are studied to gain an understanding of current Russian views about the operational use of nuclear weapons.

Chapter IV examines the strategic situation in the Caucasus. International and domestic political dynamics in this troubled region since the collapse of the Soviet Union are considered, as well as the underlying causes of conflict. The strategic interests of Russia in the region are investigated with the purpose of identifying the possibilities for future conflict involving Russia in the Caucasus. Finally, possible Russian nuclear use scenarios are outlined.

Chapter V offers conclusions based on an examination of NATO's options for conflict prevention in the Caucasus. This chapter also assesses the Alliance's response options should these prevention efforts fail – that is, what could NATO do if Russia actually employed nuclear weapons in a Caucasian conflict? This analysis includes an overview of the likely implications of Russian nuclear weapons use for international politics.

## **II: THE EVOLUTION OF SOVIET NUCLEAR DOCTRINE**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Perhaps no military issue was more important to Western planners during the Cold War than Soviet nuclear doctrine. Given the immense destructive power of arsenals on each side, the dangers of miscalculating the opponent's intentions and policies were very grave indeed. In view of the large library of existing literature on the subject, this thesis relies on a survey of writings by Soviet and Western scholars to distill and examine the important facets of Soviet strategy. The historical and ideological underpinnings of Soviet doctrine are examined, with the goal of establishing how the thought processes of Soviet planning came about. This chapter includes a brief history of Soviet nuclear strategy from Stalin through Gorbachev, a comparison of the Soviet view of nuclear deterrence with that of the United States, and an examination of Soviet views on nuclear warfighting. This includes the use of both theater and strategic nuclear weapons and Soviet views on the process of escalation. This background is intended to set the scene for an analysis of contemporary Russian nuclear doctrine and its relevance to potential crises in the Caucasus. The historical examination of Soviet nuclear doctrine serves as a historical basis to examine continuities and discontinuities with current Russian nuclear doctrine.

### **B. IDEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL INFLUENCES**

Soviet views on the nature and conduct of war differed significantly from those in the West. Western views on war had their genesis in the Enlightenment and in the belief that rational human beings could control war and violence. Russia had much less exposure to the Enlightenment, and its views of international relations tended to



subscribe more to the Hobbesian view of anarchy. Moreover, owing to Lenin's enthusiasm for Clausewitz, Soviet military thought was partly based on the writings of Clausewitz. That is, war is not a scientific game, nor an international sport, but is at base an act of violence.<sup>1</sup> Two Clausewitzian dictums – that “war has its grammar but not its own logic,” and that “war is a continuation of politics by other (i.e. more violent) means” – came to be especially important to Soviet thinkers.<sup>2</sup>

Marxist theory dictated that the class struggle dominated all interactions between states. This class struggle defined politics and policy. Clausewitz's theorem that war is a tool of policy thus fit very well with the Marxist desire to bring about a final victory in the class struggle. In other words, war would be the ultimate deciding factor in the struggle between socialism and imperialism. The Clausewitzian dictum that war is ultimately about prevailing in an act of violence found an early supporter in Engels.

Fighting is to war what cash payment is to trade, for however rarely it may be necessary for it actually to occur, everything is directed towards it, and eventually it must take place all the same, and must be decisive.<sup>3</sup>

Western concepts of limited war and mutual assured destruction (MAD) were not viewed favorably by Soviet military thinkers. In their view, war was an enterprise to be avoided if possible. However, this could not be guaranteed. According to communist ideological precepts, socialism would inevitably triumph and the capitalist imperialists would seek to aggressively stem the tide of socialism. Therefore, the ideology held, the Soviet Union had to be prepared to fight and win wars. This thinking combined the military teaching of Clausewitz with the worldview of Hobbes. Imperialism was

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<sup>1</sup> Roman Kolkowicz, “The Soviet Union: The Elusive Adversary,” *The Soviet Calculus of Nuclear War*, ed. by Roman Kolkowicz and Ellen Propper Mickiewicz (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1986), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Clausewitz, quoted in *ibid.*, 5.

considered the source of all wars, and thus the superpower relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union was replete with irreconcilable differences.<sup>4</sup> Any war between the USSR and the West would have been the third and decisive conflict between socialism and imperialism (the first having been the Russian Revolution and the second World War II).<sup>5</sup> Such a war could not come to a "just" conclusion, Soviet ideologists held, without the ultimate socialist victory over imperialism. Nuclear weapons had sufficient power to bring about such a decisive result.

The chief historical influence on Soviet strategic thought was the Second World War, or the Great Patriotic War in Soviet parlance. This is certainly understandable given the immense amount of suffering inflicted on the Soviets during the war. Most accounts of World War II that Americans are exposed to do not do justice to the enormity of the war on the Eastern Front. The war between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia was unprecedented in terms of sheer scale. Ukraine, Belorussia, the Baltic states and large stretches of European Russia were occupied and devastated by the fighting. Twenty million Soviet citizens lost their lives. The Soviets were determined to prevent such an occurrence from ever happening again.

Three basic historical conclusions were taken away from the Great Patriotic War by the Soviets. First, the Soviet Union, because of the sacrifices it made, emerged from the war stronger politically, economically, morally, and militarily. As an editorial in the Soviet journal *Military Thought* stated in 1967,

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<sup>3</sup> Engels, quoted in *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin S. Lambeth, "Contemporary Soviet Military Policy," *The Soviet Calculus of Nuclear War*, 1986, 28.

<sup>5</sup> William T. Lee and Richard F. Staar, *Soviet Military Policy Since World War II* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 27.

The victory of the Soviet people and their armed forces over the strike forces of international imperialism is of worldwide historical importance. The victory created favorable conditions for the development of socialist revolutions in the countries of Europe and Asia and the success of the national liberation struggle of peoples against the colonial yoke. All this led to the serious weakening of the positions of imperialism and reaction to the strengthening and growth of the international forces of socialism and democracy.<sup>6</sup>

The second conclusion was that the socialist system could not be defeated by the forces of imperialism. Third, the rapid economic recovery of the USSR from the devastation of war was proof of the superiority of the socialist economic system.<sup>7</sup> These Soviet conclusions ignored the contributions of the Western Allies in defeating Hitler just as much as some Western accounts tended to de-emphasize the magnitude of the Soviet-German war.

### C. SOVIET STRATEGY UNDER STALIN

The initial postwar strategic response by the Soviets to the American nuclear monopoly was to pretend to ignore it. This served both ideological and practical functions. To panic or relent in the face of an American nuclear monopoly would be to give up on an important ideological principle in the struggle between imperialism and socialism. The ultimate victory of socialism over imperialism was regarded as a historical inevitability. Stalin could certainly not allow this central tenet of communism to be undone by some new sort of technical gadgetry.<sup>8</sup> Stalin, fresh from a devastating war against National Socialist Germany, now had to be concerned by the emergence of a new Anglo-American threat that was the sole possessor of nuclear weapons.

Downplaying the significance of the American nuclear arsenal also had the effect of

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<sup>6</sup> From an editorial "A Great Half Century," *Military Thought*, no. 10, (October 1967), quoted in *ibid.*, 25.

<sup>7</sup> Lee and Staar, 25.

preserving Soviet morale and showing that the Soviet Union would not be intimidated in negotiations by the American nuclear monopoly.<sup>9</sup>

Soviet military doctrine under Stalin was based on his concept of “permanently operating factors.” These were the stability of the rear, the morale of the troops, the quantity and quality of divisions, the army’s weapons, and the organizational ability of the military command personnel.<sup>10</sup> While Stalin was alive, these would be the undisputed truths of Soviet military thinking. The element of surprise was conspicuously absent from this list of factors. Strategic surprise was seen only as a “transitory factor” that the imperialists would unsuccessfully use to try to offset their inferiority in numbers. The chief basis for this was the experience of Barbarossa in 1941. Here the Germans had the great advantage of strategic surprise, but nonetheless ultimately lost. This was a convenient interpretation for Stalin since he was responsible for the Soviets being taken so completely by surprise. This was translated into postwar Soviet thinking in that the West was accused of planning to use nuclear weapons in a manner similar to the German use of Blitzkrieg. Even though Stalin acknowledged that an American atomic assault might kill tens or hundreds of thousands of his citizens, the American atomic threat was mocked as an “atomic Blitzkrieg.”<sup>11</sup> Soviet propaganda was also quick to accuse the West of immorality by threatening the use of atomic weapons:

The revival of Douhet’s venturous ideas by the Anglo-American warlords mirrors their aspirations of conquest. Not having reliable reserves of manpower at their disposal and searching for obedient cannon fodder in the Marshallized countries, the warmongers boom and exaggerate the role of the Air Force out of all proportion. These venturous schemes are also

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, second edition (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 58.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Andrei Kokoshin, *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-1991* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 112.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 113.

based on the calculation that the peoples of the USSR and the People's Democracies will be intimidated by the so-called 'atomic' or 'push-button' war. These ideas emanate from the completely distorted view that the outcome of a war can be settled by one kind of weapon alone. History has proved the reverse more than once.<sup>12</sup>

As already mentioned, such statements were in large part intended to deflect attention from the fact that the United States possessed a monopoly over nuclear weapons. This changed, of course, with the detonation of the first Soviet bomb in 1949. The de-emphasizing of nuclear weapons under Stalin also had some basis in military fact. The huge Red Army was of great value in securing the Soviet position in Eastern Europe. Until the advent of massive arsenals of thermonuclear weapons in the late 1950s, the new devices were not destructive or numerous enough to be the decisive factor in a war between the Soviets and the West.<sup>13</sup> The recognition that nuclear weapons had fundamentally altered the face of warfare would not come during Stalin's reign. Even after the Soviets detonated their atomic and thermonuclear weapons, they were not emphasized as major factors in military thought. Even as late as 1954, the introduction of nuclear weapons into large-scale military exercises brought about no major changes in military thinking.<sup>14</sup>

#### **D. STRATEGY UNDER KHRUSHCHEV**

Josef Stalin died in March 1953. In September of that year an article appeared in the journal *Military Thought* by Major General Nikolai Talensky that signaled a change in Soviet thinking. His article argued for a scientific approach to the study of warfare that was not based on Marxist political and economic theory. Stalin's "permanently operating

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<sup>12</sup> Marshal of Aviation Vershinin, cited in 1949, cited in Freedman, 1989, 61. "Marshallized countries" referred to those Western European countries that had accepted U.S. aid under the Marshall Plan.

<sup>13</sup> Freedman, 1989, 61.

<sup>14</sup> Kokoshin, 1998, 115.

factors" were also demoted in importance. Talensky underscored the potential importance of surprise in a nuclear war, which Stalin had regarded as a merely transitory factor.<sup>15</sup> When Marshal Georgi Zhukov ascended to the post of Minister of Defense in 1955, he helped to further this change in thinking. An article by General P. A. Rotmistrov emphasizing surprise was a further indication that Soviet military thought was radically changing.

Surprise attack, employing atomic and hydrogen weapons and other modern means of conflict, now takes on new forms and is capable of leading to significantly greater results than in the past war... Surprise attack with the massive employment of new weapons can cause the rapid collapse of a government whose capacity to resist is low as a consequence of radical faults in its social and economic structure and also as a consequence of an unfavorable geographic position.<sup>16</sup>

This showed a growing move in Soviet thinking towards the logic of preemptive attacks. Nuclear weapons were seen as an essential tool for deterring the West from attacking the Soviet Union. If this deterrence failed, however, a surprise preemptive attack would be the Soviet Union's best chance to limit its damage. The fact that Rotmistrov appears to be suggesting the possibility of such attacks against counter-value civilian targets reflects the military reality of that time. The Soviet arsenal of the time was neither sufficiently large nor accurate enough to make a counter-force strategy realistic.<sup>17</sup>

Since surprise emerged as a crucial factor in military thinking, there was an increased emphasis on the importance of the initial period of war. Much of this was again drawn from Soviet experiences in World War II. The German attack had failed in the

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<sup>15</sup> Freedman, 1989, 145

<sup>16</sup> Rotmistrov, quoted in *ibid.*, 150

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

Soviet view because it did not meet its objectives in the initial period. Because the Wehrmacht was unable to completely destroy Soviet resistance in the opening months of the campaign, its ultimate fate was sealed.<sup>18</sup> The advent of nuclear weapons and the means of delivering them rapidly over intercontinental ranges meant that the initial period would be even more critical in a future war.

Special significance in nuclear rocket war is acquired by the beginning period. The importance of this period is that the first mass nuclear attack in great measure predetermines all the following course of the war... The results of using nuclear weapons might be so effective that the aims of the war will be achieved in this period.<sup>19</sup>

In January 1960, Nikita Khrushchev declared that there had been a revolution in military affairs (RMA). Technical advances, in particular the advent of the ICBM, had given nuclear weapons a preeminent role in warfare. The strategic rocket forces were emphasized, and the ground forces, the traditional source of Russian power, were reduced in size.<sup>20</sup> In Khrushchev's view, "both gigantic military coalitions will deploy massive armies in a future decisive world war; all modern, powerful and long-range means of combat, including multi-megaton nuclear rocket weapons, will be used in it on a huge scale."<sup>21</sup>

The nuclear RMA was more fully defined by Marshal V. D. Sokolovsky in his 1962 work *Military Strategy*. The work appeared to be a compromise among various schools of thought on nuclear matters. Some passages suggested that a future war would

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<sup>18</sup> This view is developed at great length in S.P. Ivanov, *The Initial Period of War* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986). This book was published in the USSR in 1974 and translated and published in the United States in 1986.

<sup>19</sup> Colonel S.V. Malyanchikov, "The Character and Features of Nuclear Rocket War," *The Nuclear Revolution in Soviet Military Affairs*, ed. by William R. Kintner and Harriet Fast Scott (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 177.

<sup>20</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union: A History* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 188.

<sup>21</sup> Khrushchev, quoted in *ibid.*, 189.

be short, while others implied that it would be long. The inevitability of escalation from a limited to a global war was also unclear. There was also a contradiction between the significance attributed to the initial period of nuclear missile attacks and the importance ascribed to conventional forces in the final period.<sup>22</sup> Sokolovsky's work also related nuclear weapons to the conventional operational art. Nuclear weapons could be used, Sokolovsky wrote, to punch holes in an enemy's front lines to allow mechanized forces to follow through. It was assumed that nuclear arms would be used against strategic targets and tactical targets on the battlefield. Sokolovsky stated that "the main means of destruction in operational large units of all types of armed forces are rocket-nuclear weapons."<sup>23</sup>

Khrushchev felt obliged to take measures to compensate for the missile gap in the early 1960s between the Soviet Union and the United States. Owing to Sputnik and the first Soviet ICBM tests, Soviet deception efforts, and other factors, the "missile gap" was widely believed in the United States in 1957-1961 to favor Moscow. Khrushchev emphasized the risk that was held over the NATO countries of Europe by Soviet forces with the goal of undermining the cohesion of the Alliance and the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. He also emphasized the destructive power of thermonuclear weapons and made declarations that any war would not stay limited.<sup>24</sup> The U.S. superiority in nuclear weapons necessitated, the Soviets argued, either a preemptive doctrine or a launch on warning doctrine. It appears that the latter option was pursued. As Marshal N. Krylov, commander of the SRF, stated in 1967:

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<sup>22</sup> Freedman, 1989, 264.

<sup>23</sup> Sokolovsky quoted in Glantz, 1992, 193.

<sup>24</sup> Freedman, 1989, 267.



With the presence in the armament of troops of launchers and missiles which are completely ready for operation, as well as systems for detecting enemy missile launchers and other types of reconnaissance, an aggressor is no longer able to suddenly destroy the missiles before their launch on the territory of the country against which the aggression is committed. They will have time during the flight of the missiles of the aggressor to leave their launchers and inflict a retaliatory strike against the enemy.<sup>25</sup>

Khrushchev's other response to U.S. nuclear superiority was to attempt a quick fix by basing IRBMs in Cuba in 1962. This would give the Soviets a way to easily threaten the eastern United States and complicate U.S. war plans. Unfortunately for Khrushchev, the United States discovered the missiles before they were operational and was able to use its nuclear superiority to back Khrushchev into a corner. This humiliation would be one of several factors that would lead to Khrushchev's ouster in 1964.<sup>26</sup>

#### **E. STRATEGY UNDER BREZHNEV**

After Khrushchev fell, the Soviet military moved to encourage an arms buildup that would bring the Soviet Union to parity with the United States in strategic weapons. Many senior military officers felt that Khrushchev had lost his nerve during the Cuban missile crisis, and rejected General Talensky's views that it was a "dangerous illusion that the idea of thermonuclear war can still serve as an instrument of politics, that it is possible to achieve political aims by using nuclear weapons and still survive."<sup>27</sup> Another Soviet writer stated that "to maintain that victory in nuclear war is in general impossible would not be only untrue theoretically but dangerous from a political point of view."<sup>28</sup> As Soviet capabilities grew, the USSR's doctrinal emphasis on surprise and the initial

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<sup>25</sup> Krylov quoted in Raymond L. Garthoff, "Mutual deterrence and strategic arms limitations in Soviet Policy," *International Security*, III:1 Summer 1978, in *ibid.*, 267.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>27</sup> Talensky, quoted in *ibid.*, 269.

<sup>28</sup> Lt. Colonel Ye. I. Ribkin, "On the Nature of World Nuclear Rocket War," *The Nuclear Revolution in Soviet Military Affairs*, 1968, 113.

period of war caused even more concern in the West that the USSR was assembling a force for warfighting, not merely for deterrence.

The doctrine of the inevitability of any war quickly becoming a global thermonuclear war began to change in the second half of the 1960s. The decade 1957-1967 had also seen a similar shift in NATO strategy towards the doctrine of "flexible response" and away from the doctrine of "massive retaliation." The Soviet development of ICBMs to threaten the United States and the 1958-1962 Berlin Crisis played large roles in this evolution.<sup>29</sup> Soviet writers began to focus more closely on operational art, reviving such pre-World War II concepts as deep battle and deep operations. Sokolovsky's earlier statements about nuclear war became more qualified. For example, in a later edition of his book, he stated that "the decisive role will be played by nuclear weapons: the other means of armed combat will utilize the results of nuclear strikes for the final defeat of the enemy."<sup>30</sup> Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the return to the study of operational art and conventional warfare continued. Ground forces, reduced in size in the 1960s, grew throughout the next two decades.<sup>31</sup>

As far as the problem of nuclear warfare was concerned, the Soviets faced questions of how to avoid, preempt, or conduct it. They relied on nuclear retaliatory capabilities to avoid it. At the same time, they sought to use political means, like the nuclear freeze movement, nuclear-weapons-free zones, and a no-first-use policy to weaken public support for nuclear deterrence in NATO countries.

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<sup>29</sup> David S. Yost, "The History of NATO Theater Nuclear Force Policy: Key Findings of the Sandia Conference," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, June 1992, pp. 228-261, 230.

<sup>30</sup> Sokolovsky, quoted in Glantz, 1992, 199.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

In short, during Brezhnev's rule (1964-1982) Soviet military thinking underwent a change back towards an emphasis on conventional means of combat, although it was a period of massive buildups in both conventional and nuclear forces. The strain that this buildup put on the Soviet system would be a major driving factor behind changes under Gorbachev.

#### **F. GORBACHEV AND THE END OF THE COLD WAR**

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, he inherited a Soviet state that possessed massive conventional and nuclear firepower, but also a crippled economy that was beginning to undermine the sustainability of communist rule. He used his policy of *glasnost* to help usher in a new period of détente with the West. Soviet military strategy followed suit in this period. In 1987, the Soviets announced that their military doctrine was purely defensive. This declaration, along with Gorbachev's United Nations speech in December 1988, ended any public Soviet discussion of operational or strategic offensives.<sup>32</sup> However, contrary to public rhetoric, Soviet operational plans until 1989 called for an extensive use of nuclear weapons in a Soviet invasion of Western Europe.<sup>33</sup> Military plans notwithstanding, the Soviets were rapidly moving into a period of relaxed tensions and arms reductions. This coincided with the peaceful collapse of the Eastern European satellite empire in 1989 and the eventual breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

#### **G. SOVIET VIEWS ON DETERRENCE**

This portion of the thesis examines Soviet views on subjects such as deterrence, warfighting, escalation, and victory. The views of the Soviets on deterrence are a useful

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>33</sup> Lothar Ruehl, "Offensive defence in the Warsaw Pact," *Survival*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 5, September-October 1991, pp.442-450. This article examines East German documents related to Warsaw Pact war plans that were obtained by NATO upon German reunification in 1990.

area to begin with since deterrence was the basis for the nuclear balance. The Soviets saw deterrence as a one-sided proposition. That is, it was perfectly desirable for the Soviet Union to deter the aggressive imperialist forces of the world, but not necessary for the Soviet Union itself to be deterred. This outlook had its roots in the Marxist ideological proposition that socialism is on the right side of history, and thus destined for ultimate victory. In Soviet thinking, deterrence was based on three elements: the correlation of economic, political and societal forces; military doctrine and strategy; and the military balance of forces.<sup>34</sup> The aggressive nature of imperialism would lead it to attempt to stem the tide of socialism by warfare if it was not deterred. It was deemed possible and desirable for the Soviet Union to gain military superiority over the West to convince it that any aggression would fail.

Similarly, the Soviets rejected the U.S. notion of mutual assured destruction (MAD). They believed that such theories abandoned leadership responsibility and instead sought to base the USSR's nuclear strategy on denial rather than punishment. The United States would be better deterred if denied a credible war option by the Soviet Union. Soviet planners therefore developed a strategy to fight and prevail in a nuclear war. They believed that the force most capable of dominating events in case of war would be the source of greatest leverage during peace.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast, strategic thinking in the United States came to depend on Albert Wohlstetter's theory of a "delicate balance of terror" in which deterrence based on survivable second-strike forces was a mutual proposition, with each side refraining from entering a war that it knew it could not win. Since neither side saw any advantage in

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<sup>34</sup> Lee and Staar, 1986, 24.

starting such a war, the theory held, MAD was a source of stability. Ever since Robert McNamara explored the viability of a counterforce strategy in the early 1960s, U.S. thinking has been based on the general disbelief that a nuclear war is winnable.<sup>36</sup> It is worth noting that these different views on deterrence are not necessarily incompatible. In both views, the United States has no desire or reason to launch a nuclear war, so such a war is deterred. This equation would have changed, however, if the Soviets ever came to believe that the "correlation of forces" was either decisively in their favor or against them. In the first case, the Soviets might have felt compelled to launch a war for the final overthrow of imperialism. In the latter, more dangerous case, they might have launched a preemptive strike because they believed the West was about to attack. This was somewhat the case in the early 1980s when Operation VRYAN was launched by the KGB to determine if just such an eventuality was about to come to fruition.<sup>37</sup> The Soviets feared that the United States would use its Pershing II missiles in Europe to launch a decapitating first strike. This paranoia was increased by the strident rhetoric of the Reagan Administration and by the general U.S. arms buildup.

## H. WARFIGHTING AND ESCALATION

The Soviets developed a warfighting doctrine that identified several key requirements for successfully prosecuting a nuclear war. The first of these was a survivable command and control capability.<sup>38</sup> In a system involving such militarily, politically and symbolically important weapons, the system of command and control

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<sup>35</sup> Lambeth in *The Soviet Calculus of Nuclear War*, 1986, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Freedman, 1989, 245-56.

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, ed., *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 67-90.

<sup>38</sup> Robbin F. Laird and Dale R. Herspring, *The Soviet Union and Strategic Arms* (London: Westview Press, 1984), 67.

must be reliable and robust. There must be a delicate balance between positive and negative control over the forces. If too tightly controlled, they would be too inflexible to employ under combat conditions; if too loosely controlled, an unacceptable risk of an accidental or unauthorized use could arise. The command and control nodes would naturally be primary targets of an enemy's attack, so all possible means must be taken to ensure their survival.

The Soviets appeared to be morbidly afraid of the possibility that the United States would launch a decapitating first strike, removing the possibility of swift retaliation. Operation VRYAN in the early 1980s was in large part prompted by this fear and accentuated by the deployment of U.S. Pershing II missiles to Europe. The primary reaction plan to a massive attack was a launch-on-warning posture; the first missiles of the retaliatory strike would leave their silos before the first impact of U.S. missiles. Soviet planners ran computer simulations that seemed to confirm this as the only option; such simulations showed the danger of a decapitating first strike and strategic paralysis.<sup>39</sup>

As characterized by Alexei Arbatov, the posture was "the one-sided Soviet strategy which relied exclusively on the launch-on-warning principle."<sup>40</sup> This had its ultimate evolution in the so-called "dead hand" system. In that scenario, if a possible surprise attack were detected towards Moscow (from a U.S. ballistic missile submarine or a Pershing II, the most likely instruments in the Soviet analysis), the Soviet command authority could send a preliminary launch message to order massive and rapid retaliation if it was confirmed that command from Moscow was lost. This retaliatory strike would

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<sup>39</sup> See Bruce G. Blair "Russian Control of Nuclear Weapons," *The Nuclear Challenge in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. by George Quester (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 73.

<sup>40</sup> Arbatov, quoted in Blair, 1995, 73.

have been launched by a crew in a command bunker if a preliminary message had been received, communications with the national command authority had been lost, and there was evidence of nuclear detonations.<sup>41</sup> This "dead hand" system appears to have been akin to the "doomsday device" suggested in the film *Dr. Strangelove*.

The second chief requirement is the aforementioned element of surprise.<sup>42</sup> The third is the ability to conduct combined arms operations in a nuclear battlefield. As already discussed, this evolved out of the nuclear RMA of Khrushchev's time. Such operations present the problem of conflicting requirements. Conventional battles require massed and concentrated firepower, whereas nuclear operations require the dispersal of forces to increase their survivability. The Soviet response to this problem was to plan to attack Western Europe along a single axis in order to rapidly exploit the USSR's own tactical strikes. As Soviet Colonel I. Liutov stated, it was necessary to concentrate "main efforts on a main axis, and particularly the bulk of nuclear firepower, as well as in rapid exploitation by the troops of the results of nuclear strikes."<sup>43</sup> Following this exploitation, the forces must then be able to maneuver and disperse so as not to be vulnerable to enemy nuclear strikes.<sup>44</sup> Despite Soviet pronouncements about no-first-use, this operational doctrine is fitted to a posture of first use.

Strategic defense was the final major requirement in Soviet plans for nuclear warfighting. This can be grouped into five facets.<sup>45</sup> The first is ballistic missile defense

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<sup>41</sup> See Blair, 1995, and Valeri Yarynich, "The Doomsday Machine's Safety Catch," *The New York Times*, 1 February 1994, available through Lexis-Nexis. Mr. Blair had initially suggested that the system was completely automatic, but Mr. Yarynich (a retired SRF officer) clarified that human operators were still necessary to send the final launch message.

<sup>42</sup> Liutov quoted in Laird and Herspring, 1984, 69.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> The following discussion paraphrased from *ibid.*, 74.

(BMD). In 1972 the ABM Treaty was signed, limiting each side to two strategic BMD sites. The U.S. system came into being briefly, but was closed down almost at once. In contrast, the Soviets maintained an operational system around Moscow. The second facet is anti-submarine warfare. From a Soviet perspective, one of the missions of the USSR's fast-attack submarines was to hunt down and destroy U.S. Fleet Ballistic Missile submarines. The third form is strategic air defense against strategic bombers. The USSR had an extensive system to protect its vast territory. The fourth and fifth forms of strategic defense are largely passive. One is to conceal and disperse important military and industrial sites to make them harder to target. The final facet is civil defense for the government and the civilian population, for which numerous deep underground shelters were built.

Closely related to warfighting were the Soviet perceptions about the nature of escalation in a major war. Soviet planning sought escalation dominance, so the United States could not gain any advantage by escalating the war along the various steps to an all-out exchange. Soviet declaratory policy about the inevitability of any limited nuclear exchange escalating to an all-out global war was probably intended to serve deterrence as well as diplomatic purposes. As Nathan Leites, an analyst with the RAND Corporation, stated:

It is perhaps just because the Soviets are so interested in the distinction between deterrence and warfighting that they have kept silent about it. The war not being yet begun, this is the hour of deterrence: deterrence by the prospect of a maximum initial strike, of preemption, and of the none-or-all character of nuclear war. Once the war is on, the Authorities may adopt that "controlled" conduct about which the West (in a possible Soviet estimate) is now so prematurely chattering.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Nathan Leites, *Soviet Style in War* (New York: Crane, Rusak & Company, 1982), 379.



It is probable that the Soviets envisioned several phases from tactical nuclear use all the way up to a full-blown exchange with the United States. At the theater level, the Soviets would have probably used theater nuclear forces (TNF) for both political and military purposes. One political goal was to undermine the cohesion of the NATO Alliance. There were always European fears about the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence, and Soviet strategy attempted to exploit these fears. The USSR could have used its TNF against targets in Europe and declared that U.S. and Soviet territory were "sanctuaries" that would not be struck as long as both sides respected this principle. By this logic, the United States would have been encouraged to respond with its own TNF exclusively within the non-Soviet portions of the Warsaw Pact or on the battlefield in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and in other NATO European countries. The pressure on the United States from Moscow in this case would have been strongly against reprisal attacks on the Soviet Union, but U.S. and NATO policy during the Cold War always rejected the Soviet notion that Soviet territory should be regarded as a sanctuary. Indeed, the FRG was the strongest proponent in NATO Europe of forcing the Soviets to reckon with the full spectrum of escalation, including strikes against the USSR with U.S. strategic forces.

Soviet TNF might also have been employed at a slightly higher level of escalation against strategic-theater targets like NATO command posts, nuclear weapons storage sites, and airfields. This was the probable strategy, especially if the Soviets wished to limit the possible damage that a NATO TNF strike could inflict. This strategy might have been taken a step further with the use of either TNF or the strategic rocket forces

(SRF) in a counterforce attack against vulnerable British and French strategic forces (SSBN bases, bomber bases, and French IRBMs).<sup>47</sup>

A further level of escalation might have involved strategic maneuvers that, while not directly attacking the U.S. homeland, would have sought to demonstrate to the United States the dangers of further resistance. These maneuvers might have included a demonstration of Soviet intent by effecting a large-scale urban evacuation, or by placing all of the USSR's strategic forces at the highest levels of alert. Anti-satellite capabilities could have been utilized to disable U.S. early warning and communications systems.<sup>48</sup> It is important to remember that at all of these levels of escalation, the Soviets would have sought leverage to coerce the United States and NATO into accepting Soviet demands.

From here the nuclear exchanges would probably have escalated into strikes against the U.S. and Soviet homelands. The most important targets for the Soviets would have included U.S. ICBM silos, strategic bomber bases, early-warning systems, and command and control nodes.<sup>49</sup> At the stage of a limited attack, the Soviets might have sought to attack a sampling of some or all of these critical targets. Exchanges in this phase of escalation might have also included urban-industrial centers, with the intention of demonstrating the seriousness of the situation. A further variant of this strategy one step up the escalatory ladder would have been a massive counterforce strike aimed at eliminating as many of the aforementioned critical targets as possible.<sup>50</sup> The step up from the previous two levels of escalation would have been significant, because the intention would have been not a demonstration of will, but gaining a massive military

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 78

advantage. Moving up to this step would have been problematical for the Soviets because they knew that the United States would have been able to launch a massive retaliatory strike, especially if U.S. strategic forces were at a heightened level of alert.<sup>51</sup> The importance of surprise in Soviet thinking should be recalled in this regard. The Soviets might have reasoned that it would be desirable for them to skip several rungs on the ladder of escalation in order to gain the greatest military advantage.

Following a massive counterforce attack the options of either limited or massive countervalue attacks against U.S. urban and industrial centers would have remained, assuming that U.S. retaliatory strikes had not neutralized Soviet command and control capabilities. This would have been the Armageddon MAD scenario that rational planners would have hoped to avoid, but events could have spiraled out of control to such an eventuality. In targeting for this scenario, Soviet planners examined the American economy to determine what the most advantageous targets would be to prevent regeneration of U.S. fighting capabilities. These appeared to include power grids, oil refineries, and important industrial nodes (steel, chemicals, and defense factories). Another goal would have been to attack the political organs that would be needed for a reconstitution of civil order.<sup>52</sup> In such a scenario, it is assumed that the Soviets, having suffered comparable damage, would seek to create a situation in which their reconstitution and regeneration capabilities would have been better than those of the United States.

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<sup>49</sup> Joseph D. Douglass, Jr. and Amoretta M. Hoeber, *Soviet Strategy for Nuclear War* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1979), 75-80.

<sup>50</sup> Laird and Herspring, 1984, 79.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Douglass and Hoeber, 1979, 85-87.

What were the Soviet concepts of victory in a nuclear war at any level of escalation? According to Soviet ideology, a nuclear war would have amounted to a military operation, certainly one with a potentially greater degree of destruction than any in human history, but not one completely devoid of strategic meaning.<sup>53</sup> In keeping with the Clausewitzian definition of war, the logical first objective of Soviet strategy was the defeat of enemy armed forces and military potential. The phrase "military potential" is ambiguous as it suggests that such attacks would not be purely of the counterforce variety. As one Soviet officer stated:

For the achievement of victory in a present-day nuclear war, if it is unleashed by the imperialists, not only the enemy's armed forces, but also sources of his military power, the important economic centers, and also points of military and state control as well as the areas where different branches of armed forces are based, will be subjected to simultaneous destruction.<sup>54</sup>

Once the armed forces of imperialism were defeated, Soviet ideology held, the triumphant march of socialism would be able to proceed. The next step in pursuing this goal would have been to seize strategic areas that would give the Soviets additional military and political leverage. These might have included critical naval chokepoints, industrial areas, and oil-producing regions.<sup>55</sup> The seizure of all of these objectives would have gained the Soviets further advantages on their way to eventual victory. The Soviet ideology of victory dictated that enemy territories would have been occupied and converted to socialist states.<sup>56</sup> This would have been especially important in Europe, in order to deny imperialist forces any land areas contiguous to the Soviet sphere. It is

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<sup>53</sup> Fritz W. Emarth, "Contrasts in American and Soviet Strategic Thought," *Soviet Military Thinking*, ed. by Derek Leebaert (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 56.

<sup>54</sup> Colonel M. Shirokov, "The Question of Influences on the Military and Economic Potential of Warring States," *Voyennaya Mysl*, 1968 no. 5, quoted in Douglass and Hoeber, 1979, 16.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

unclear whether the Soviets ever realistically thought of an invasion of the United States, or whether they assumed it would come into the socialist fold as a result of its defeat by Soviet ground forces in Europe and by the SRF in the U.S. homeland. Speculation about Soviet planning at this point becomes quite fanciful, because, if the phrase MAD was truly an accurate portrayal of the results of a full-scale nuclear war, there would have been little left in the hitherto "civilized" world worth occupying.

## I. CONCLUSION

Soviet nuclear doctrine evolved in historical and ideological circumstances distinct from those of the United States. During the initial period of inferiority, the doctrine downplayed the importance of the new weapon and emphasized Soviet conventional might and the inevitable progression of history. During the period when the Soviets were developing a credible arsenal, Khrushchev tried to use threats and bombast to make the Soviets equal to the West. The dangerous consequences of this resulted in his downfall and the redoubling of efforts to build up the Soviet nuclear arsenal. The USSR did reach a rough parity with the United States under Brezhnev. This provided a basis for Soviet political strategy until Gorbachev adopted a new approach to relations with the West.

In its ultimate form, Soviet nuclear doctrine was in fact a warfighting strategy. Deterrence was seen as desirable, but the Soviets refused to be governed by the concept of MAD. According to Soviet doctrine, a realistic plan for conducting nuclear war would provide the most effective basis for deterrence. This strategy flowed from Clausewitz's dictum that war is the continuation of politics by other means. Soviet doctrine held that a

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 82.

nuclear war must serve some strategic purpose. To achieve the ultimate victory of socialism over imperialism, the Soviet Union formulated various plans for waging war at different levels of violence. All of these operations had the goal of bringing about the decisive military and political defeat of the West.

### **III: RUSSIAN MILITARY REFORM AND DOCTRINE**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its hulking military machine, Russian military planners have sought to redefine Russia's military posture to reflect its new security environment. Military reform naturally plays an important role in this process. The debacle in Chechnya in 1994-1996 made it apparent that the post-Soviet Russian army was not up to the challenge of defending the country's territorial integrity against poorly equipped domestic uprisings, much less against any substantial foreign threat. Reform has moved in the direction of a smaller and more professional force. This would represent a major cultural shift away from the traditional Russian practice of relying on a massive conventional army composed largely of conscripts to defend the country's borders and interests. In addition Russia in 1993 adopted a new military doctrine that puts more emphasis on nuclear weapons in light of Russia's conventional military deficiencies.

The consequences of such a change in posture are best examined from two standpoints: the feasibility for Russia itself to successfully adopt such a strategy and the exact nature of Russia's nuclear doctrine. The question of modernizing and professionalizing Russia's military is a problematic one, given the current internal state of affairs both economically and politically. Naturally, the importance of nuclear weapons is greatly accentuated under such conditions. This chapter examines the collapse of Russia's conventional military capability and the reform process that is intended to reverse this trend. The chapter also investigates the process of military

doctrinal reform in Russia and the new postures for both strategic and non-strategic (or tactical) nuclear weapons that have resulted from the process.

## **B. THE COLLAPSE OF RUSSIAN CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CAPABILITY**

The end of the Soviet state had dire consequences for the Red Army. The force that had once been the dread of Europe was reduced in less than five years to a force that could not even defeat a loosely organized group of Chechen rebels. The defeat in the First Chechen War (1994-1996) was the most tangible demonstration of the ineptitude of Russian conventional forces, but a closer look at a number of quantitative and qualitative factors is even more sobering. Efforts at reform have largely failed due to a lack of financial resources and to political infighting within the military establishment. Given that Russia appears bent on continuing to behave as if it was a great power, and that its own leaders acknowledge that nuclear weapons must now substitute for conventional forces,<sup>57</sup> it is possible to imagine various scenarios in the Caucasus and elsewhere in which Russian generals, bogged down and desperate, might turn to the nuclear option.

By any number of quantitative measures, the picture for the Russian military is bad and growing worse. In a comparison of the Russian armed forces in 1996 with the Soviet military of 1986, active duty manpower had decreased by more than 70 percent.<sup>58</sup> The huge 3:1 Soviet advantage over the United States in armored fighting vehicles in 1986 had become a U.S. advantage.<sup>59</sup> Numbers of combat aircraft and artillery pieces have decreased by more than one third in the same time period.<sup>60</sup> Badly outclassed by

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<sup>57</sup> Russian Duma member Alexei Arbatov, quoted in Stuart D. Goldman, *Russian Conventional Armed Forces: On the Verge of Collapse?* Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, 1997, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Goldman, 1997, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



the U.S. Navy even at the height of its power, today's Russian Navy has no conventional combatants that can hope to match the firepower of a U.S. Navy carrier battle group.<sup>61</sup>

The numbers for the future look even worse, because funds for new weapons procurement are virtually nonexistent. This could lead to a crisis of bloc obsolescence within the next ten years. Most of the existing weapons systems were designed in the late 1970s or early 1980s and are fast approaching the end of their useful service lives.<sup>62</sup>

If one looks at qualitative indicators of Russian military readiness, the picture is equally bad. In 1997, some experts put the number of combat-ready ground divisions at somewhere between zero and eight. Perhaps only 20 percent of tanks and fewer than half of combat aircraft can be considered operational.<sup>63</sup> As far as training is concerned, there have been no divisional-level exercises since 1992, and combat pilots on average fly 30 hours per year, or less than one-tenth as many as their U.S. counterparts.<sup>64</sup> Morale is abysmal, with rampant hazing among conscripts and enlisted men and a terrible retention problem for officers.<sup>65</sup>

### **C. RUSSIAN MILITARY REFORM**

The process of military reform in Russia has been a halting one for the last ten years. The final years of Gorbachev's reign saw shrinking defense budgets, along with disengagement from the Soviets' traditional sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. In 1990, the Soviets disavowed the use of warfare for political gains, claimed that no state was inherently their enemy, and sought to preserve military parity as a cornerstone of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

stability.<sup>66</sup> After the establishment of the Russian Federation in 1991, Defense Minister Pavel Grachev sought to dismantle much of the old apparatus and create a Mobile Force to better deal with regional contingencies on the periphery of Russia. During the period 1993-1995, Grachev proposed that the size of the military be cut, and that up to half of the NCOs and enlisted personnel become "contract" volunteers.<sup>67</sup> Opposition from the General Staff doomed these plans, and an attempt was made to preserve as much of the old apparatus as possible. The disastrous war in Chechnya in 1994-1996 brought the military to the brink of complete collapse, confirming that reforms were necessary. As this defeat suggested, and by almost any objective quantitative or qualitative measure, Russia's conventional fighting capability had sunk to a dangerously low level. By 1996, a presidential election season was in full swing, and any attempts to reform the military became highly politicized. Grachev was a casualty of this process.<sup>68</sup> After the election, there were still calls for an all-volunteer force, but the lack of a professional NCO corps exacerbated the obstacles to making the military a professional force. Problems with pay to officers have also fed discontent in the armed forces and provided a weapon to opponents of reform.

By 1997, the reform debate went public between Grachev's replacement as Defense Minister, Igor Rodionov, and Yuri Baturin, the Defense Council Secretary, with the latter hoping for a quick transition to a force modeled on the U.S. military.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, increased tensions with the West were becoming apparent, especially with

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<sup>66</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, *Russian Military Reform: Ten Years of Failure*, presented at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 26-27 March 1997, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 31.

regard to NATO expansion. This has come to be a unifying factor among Russia's disparate foreign policy factions.

Alexei Arbatov, the deputy chairman of the Committee on Defense of the Duma, has identified several areas where there is a general consensus among the positions advocated by the various proponents of military reform. First, Russia must maintain defensive capabilities that will effectively address real threats while not overburdening the economy. Second, the traditional Russian emphasis on quantity of forces must be changed to an emphasis on quality. Third, recent tensions with NATO notwithstanding, Russia must reorient its contingency planning away from Western European and global theaters and instead plan for actions on Russia's southern rim. Finally, Russia's nuclear deterrent is an indispensable guarantor of security against major threats until this reform process can be completed.<sup>70</sup>

Officially, the Russian Defense Ministry has not determined exact details of the ultimate reorganization of the Russian armed forces. Arbatov envisions a scenario in which the armed forces would be comprised of 1,000 to 1,500 combat and transport aircraft, 15 to 17 heavy army divisions and 2 to 3 light divisions. The navy's main missions would be to protect Russian SSBNs and guard exclusive commercial zones. Naval forces under this scenario would consist of 70 to 80 large surface combatants, 40 to 50 attack submarines, and 200 to 300 shore-based naval aircraft. It is also assumed that START III will be concluded with the United States, and that this treaty will reduce

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<sup>70</sup> Alexei Arbatov, "Military Reform in Russia: Dilemmas, Obstacles and Prospects," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), 86-87.

strategic arms to a level of 1,300 to 1,500 warheads. Total manpower levels will be reduced from the present 1.2 million to 800,000 to 900,000 by about 2005.<sup>71</sup>

There are still many obstacles to successfully implementing these reforms. The largest of these is financial. Paradoxically, it is more expensive to reduce manpower levels initially than to maintain them. This is because officers are entitled to severance pay, housing, and relocation allowances as they are retired.<sup>72</sup> This has two effects. On one hand, the cost involved with reducing manpower levels provides political ammunition to those opposed to doing so. On the other hand, if these reductions are undertaken, they will account for a large portion of the defense budget and squeeze out spending that is vitally needed for procurement of new weapons to equip the downsized force. Another major obstacle is the continued infighting among members of the defense establishment. For example, Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev's plans for an integrated command of the nuclear forces are being vehemently resisted by Chief of the General Staff Anatoli Kvashnin.<sup>73</sup> According to Russian defense journalist Pavel Felgenhauer, as a result, "Kvashnin is running the Russian Army into the ground."<sup>74</sup>

The final major obstacle to successful reform of the Russian military is the lack of a consensus on the strategic direction of Russian foreign policy. The military cannot be an effective tool of this policy until the policy itself is elucidated. Will Russia continue to harbor great power ambitions and attempt to influence events in Europe? Or will Russia begin to look inward and seek to solve its own problems while pursuing a

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 121-123.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>73</sup> Ian Traynor "Bogged Down in Chechnya, Russia Returns to Cold War Rhetoric and the Nuclear Option," *The Guardian*, London, 14 January 2000. FBIS transcribed text.

<sup>74</sup> Felgenhauer, quoted in *ibid.*

cooperative foreign policy that focuses mainly on local threats? The answers to these questions will in time be provided by the actions of the new Putin government.

#### **D. RUSSIAN MILITARY DOCTRINE**

Now that the reform process has evolved to its present state, what are the prospects for reform to a new military posture in Russia? This must be looked at from two angles. First, what is the probability of Russia being able to create a credible conventional force able to respond effectively to the regional security problems that Russia is faced with? Secondly, would this force, even successfully created, be able to serve with nuclear weapons as an effective and credible deterrent? On the first question, the jury is still out. Many U.S. and Russian analysts foresee a long-term crisis of Russian conventional capabilities, especially if Russia is determined to reassert its status as a great power. The latest version of the Russian Federation military doctrine was announced in April 2000, and it throws some light on Russian aspirations.

The military doctrine of April 2000 is the product of a long evolutionary process in Russian military thought dating back to the aftermath of the 1905 Russo-Japanese War. During the Soviet period military doctrine was beholden to the larger ideological doctrine of the Soviet state. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian military leaders set out to define what their new doctrine would be. In November 1993 a new doctrine was approved. It must be remembered that this was also the time of a post-Cold War "honeymoon" when both Russia and the United States spoke hopefully of a new partnership and before any of the recent Russia-NATO tensions became apparent.

The new military doctrine outlines the world military and political situation through Russian eyes. The document offers a less positive perspective on relations with

the West than the 1993 doctrine. The first draft of this document, released in October 1999, viewed the current situation as being defined as a conflict between “a unipolar world based on one superpower and on the use of military force to resolve key problems of world policy, and...a multipolar world based on the equal rights of peoples and nations...”<sup>75</sup> The unnamed unipolar power is the United States. The October 1999 draft further stated that “The Russian Federation proceeds from the assumption that social progress, stability, and international security can be ensured only within the framework of a multipolar world.”<sup>76</sup> This worldview is completely consistent with Russian opposition to NATO enlargement, to NATO actions in the former Yugoslavia, to Anglo-American military actions against Iraq, and frankly to any other major action by the United States and its allies that excludes Russia as an active participant. This language was, however, deleted from the official version adopted in April 2000.<sup>77</sup>

The deletion of this language may be largely a political gesture to signal that Putin’s government is interested in pursuing a more business-like relationship with the West than its predecessors. The updated version of the doctrine does still identify a major threat as “the expansion of military blocs and alliances to the detriment of the Russian Federation’s military security.”<sup>78</sup> This is obviously a reference to NATO enlargement. Another factor, in line with Russia’s criticism of NATO and U.S. military actions (notably the NATO intervention in Kosovo in March-June 1999) is the “utilization of military-force actions as a means of ‘humanitarian intervention’ without

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<sup>75</sup> Russian Federation Draft Military Doctrine, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Moscow, 9 October 1999, Paragraph 1.1. FBIS translated text.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Russian Federation Military Doctrine, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Moscow, 22 April 2000. FBIS translated text.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Section I, Paragraph 5

the sanction of the UN Security Council, in circumvention of the generally accepted principles and norms of international law.”<sup>79</sup>

Russian thought has stayed in line with Soviet thinking, especially when considering the importance of the “initial period of war”. In Soviet doctrine the initial period of war was the decisive period when the character and outcome of the whole war could be determined. This was true both for offensive and defensive operations. The great example from Soviet history for this was Hitler’s invasion in 1941. Because the Germans failed to achieve their strategic goals in the initial period, and because Soviet forces were able to deny them that success, the outcome of the war was determined.<sup>80</sup> Therefore the way in which a state moves into this initial period is very important. In the new Russian military doctrine, the initial period is again emphasized, with such actions as a timely declaration of war, coordination of various types of warfare efforts, placing the economy on a war footing, and coordination of mobilization all given high priority.<sup>81</sup> With the increased range and lethality of modern weapons (especially nuclear), the initial period can now be seen as even more decisive.<sup>82</sup>

## **E. NUCLEAR DOCTRINE**

Nuclear employment policy under the new doctrine continues in the same spirit as the 1993 doctrine, which gave up the explicit no-first-use pledge that was Soviet policy since 1982. While it possessed massive conventional forces, the Soviet Union was able to depend on a “second-strike” nuclear posture.<sup>83</sup> This required the possession of a survivable deterrent that would be able to inflict unacceptable retaliatory damage on any

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Paragraph 3

<sup>80</sup> This view is expounded at length in Ivanov, S.P., *The Initial Period of War*, 1986.

<sup>81</sup> Russian Military Doctrine, 2000, Section I, Paragraph 10.

<sup>82</sup> Gareev, General Makhmut, *If War Comes Tomorrow?* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 110.

aggressor. Given the collapse of Russian conventional force capabilities, the conventional force posture may no longer be able to deter a conventional attack. The wording of the nuclear weapons use policy in the new doctrine is as follows:

The Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and (or) its allies, as well as in response to large-scale aggression utilizing conventional weapons in situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation.

The Russian Federation will not use nuclear weapons against states party to the Nonproliferation Treaty that do not possess nuclear weapons except in the event of an attack on the Russian Federation, the Russian Federation Armed Forces or other troops, its allies, or a state to which it has security commitments that is carried out or supported by a state without nuclear weapons jointly or in the context of allied commitments with a state with nuclear weapons.<sup>84</sup>

The last statement is a reflection of the negative security assurances Russia offered in conjunction with the 1995 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review and extension conference.

What then are the reasons behind such a change in policy? Nuclear weapons are seen as the ultimate deterrent to great power war. As long as Russia is in possession of these weapons, no adversary will be able to contemplate a major attack against Russian soil.<sup>85</sup> Since nuclear weapons serve as a deterrent against aggression or coercion, they are a useful hedge against uncertainty for Russian planners.<sup>86</sup> As Defense Minister Sergeyev stated in October 1998,

In case of direct threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state owing to an external aggression against Russia, [it would be]

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<sup>83</sup> Nikolai Sokov, "Russia's Approach to Nuclear Weapons," *The Washington Quarterly*, summer 1997, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Russian Military Doctrine, 2000, Section I, Paragraph 8.

<sup>85</sup> Sokov, 1997, 2.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.



possible and legitimate to use all available means, up to and including nuclear weapons, to counter this threat.<sup>87</sup>

The old second-strike logic of possessing the ability to inflict a retaliatory strike of unacceptable damage on a would-be aggressor remains. Calculations for what exactly constitutes this deterrence capability are complex, as are the formulae that determine the proper force constitution to ensure a retaliatory capability. As Nikolai Sokov, a Russian analyst, explains, the main point is to make the other side believe that Russia has this ability, because if that belief is not maintained and a nuclear strike is launched, deterrence has failed.<sup>88</sup>

These changes in Russia's strategic nuclear posture are understandable in light of the deficiencies in its conventional forces. The nuclear posture of the United States and NATO has long followed the principle of "flexible response," in that no guarantee against first use has been given. This was partly intended to compensate for the overwhelming numerical superiority of the Warsaw Pact conventional forces. Today the situation is reversed, and it is Russia that is conventionally weak.

The published military doctrine is primarily a political statement that does not necessarily capture the dynamics of Russian military thought about nuclear deterrence. According to Nikolai Sokov, the debate in Russia is now between the liberal-minded "minimalist" view of deterrence and the hawkish "maximalist" view.<sup>89</sup> The "minimalist" camp sees nuclear weapons as an insurance policy that should be maintained at a

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<sup>87</sup> Sergeyev quoted in Walter Parchomenko, "The State of Russia's Armed Forces and Military Reform," *Parameters*, Winter 1999-2000.

<sup>88</sup> Sokov, 1997, 3.

<sup>89</sup> Nikolai Sokov, *Modernization of Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Russia: The Emerging New Posture*, Program on New Approaches to Russian Security Working Paper No. 6, May 1998, 5.

relatively low cost because the future threat may not materialize. For example, according to Sergei Kortunov, a Russian commentator,

The optimal version of Russia's nuclear strategy today is a variant of non-aggressive, non-offensive and non-provocative (one could even say "friendly"), but also credible deterrence, which should be aimed not only at the United States, but "at all azimuths" – a Russian version of ... de Gaulle's doctrine of "dissuasion" as opposed to the American doctrine of "deterrence" through the threat of annihilation.<sup>90</sup>

Unfortunately, many in the Russian military establishment champion the "maximalist" view of nuclear deterrence.<sup>91</sup> Although freed from the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Soviet era, these thinkers still believe that a credible warfighting doctrine and posture constitute the best deterrent. Those in the "maximalist" camp call for an expansion of the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence, strategic force modernization and an expanded role for non-strategic or tactical nuclear forces.<sup>92</sup> Statements by people in this camp are the greatest cause for alarm, because they speak openly of a lower threshold for nuclear weapons use.

### **1. Strategic Nuclear Weapons**

Since strategic nuclear weapons now constitute one of Moscow's major remaining reasons to be considered relevant in international affairs, Russia is adamant about preserving the deterrent capability at all costs. Recent Russian reactions to the possibility of the U.S. deployment of National Missile Defense (NMD) attest to this. Measures such as the adoption of a preemptive strike doctrine and outfitting the new SS-27 ICBM with multiple warheads have been openly considered in the face of such a U.S.

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<sup>90</sup> Sergei Kortunov quoted in *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Pry, *War Scare* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 1999), 263-272.

<sup>92</sup> Sokov, 1998, 8.

capability.<sup>93</sup> This is not to suggest that the United States would ever seriously consider launching an aggressive or unprovoked nuclear attack on Russia. The main Russian fear is that the loss of a viable retaliatory capability could leave Russia vulnerable to precision conventional attacks such as those the United States has conducted in Iraq and Serbia.<sup>94</sup> An attack on national assets that are viewed as vital, such as early warning radars and command and control installations, could also be seen as an attack on Russia's retaliatory capability and require a nuclear response.<sup>95</sup>

Russia faces serious questions about where to proceed with its strategic arsenal in light of its obligations under START II and its desire to seek further bilateral reductions under START III. The Russian military realizes that because of economic constraints it will be hard-pressed to maintain its arsenal even at START II levels.<sup>96</sup> Regardless of what transpires in arms control negotiations, Russia faces the bloc obsolescence of its strategic arsenal in the 2005-2010 period. It is currently proceeding with the deployment of the SS-27 ICBM, but the rest of the triad is becoming obsolete. Given the economic constraints that it faces, Russia may be forced to give up most of its sea- and air-launched nuclear weapons and base its deterrent entirely on land-based ICBMs. If this scenario comes to fruition, it will be more difficult for Russia to maintain START II force levels.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> "U.S. NMD decision prompts Russia to toughen nuclear doctrine," *Aerospace Daily*, 25 March 1999. Available through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>94</sup> Sokov, 1997, 3.

<sup>95</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, "Rybkin's Preventive Strike," *Segodnya*, 13 February 1997. FBIS translated text.

<sup>96</sup> Sokov, 1998, 20.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

## 2. Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons

During the Cold War, the Soviets built up a stockpile of well over 10,000 tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>98</sup> By the middle of the 1980s, the Soviet tactical nuclear arsenal was estimated to be at least the equal of its NATO counterpart. Although the Soviets had announced an official position of no-first-use in 1982, they were quite prepared for a limited nuclear war, although this was not openly acknowledged.<sup>99</sup> In 1991, U.S. President George Bush announced the unilateral removal from operational status and dismantling of most U.S. tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>100</sup> An understanding was reached with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and with his successor, Russian President Boris Yeltsin, that Russia would follow suit. However, it appears that Russia to date has done less than it promised to do in this area.<sup>101</sup>

Russia is probably continuing to keep these weapons operational because it believes that it may have cause to use them – for deterrence purposes, if not in combat. Recent statements indicate that the threshold for using non-strategic nuclear weapons has been lowered. Russian military officials and analysts talk of using nuclear arms preemptively against potential conventional attacks. Such strikes might have the purpose of controlling escalation of a conflict.<sup>102</sup> A recent article in the Russian military newspaper *Voyennaya Mysl* argued for nuclear weapons use to de-escalate military operations:

Fulfilling the de-escalation function is understood to mean actually using nuclear weapons both for showing resolve as well as for the

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<sup>98</sup> David S. Yost, *The US and Nuclear Deterrence in Europe*, Adelphi Paper 326, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1999, 50.

<sup>99</sup> Ruehl, "Offensive defence in the Warsaw Pact," 1991.

<sup>100</sup> Stephen P. Lambert and David A. Miller, *Russia's Crumbling Tactical Nuclear Weapons Complex: An Opportunity for Arms Control*, INSS Occasional Paper 12, Institute for National Security Studies, 1997, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Yost, 1999, 50.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

immediate delivery of nuclear strikes against the enemy. It is advisable to execute this mission using non-strategic (above all operational-tactical) nuclear weapons, which can preclude an "avalanching" escalation of the use of nuclear weapons right up to an exchange of massed nuclear strikes delivered by strategic assets. It seems that the cessation of military operations will be the most acceptable thing for the enemy in this case.<sup>103</sup>

Non-strategic nuclear weapons are also seen as a means to achieve or restore a favorable balance of forces on the battlefield. Statements to this effect acknowledge the weakness of the Russian military's conventional forces. One Russian commentator has stated that "Russia would make a first strike not to achieve decisive victory, but to impose its will on the adversary, and for practical purposes, to restore the status quo on the battlefield."<sup>104</sup> Russian journalist Pavel Felgenhauer has stated that, due to Russia's conventional military weakness,

This means that in any confrontation with the expanding West (say, a conflict over Russian military transit in and out of the Kaliningrad enclave), Russian generals will feel compelled to prevent the massing of superior enemy forces not with a preemptive conventional offensive, but with a first and early local nuclear strike.<sup>105</sup>

One new doctrinal proposal in Russia calls for a policy in which the employment of tactical nuclear forces would be controlled at several different levels of escalation, always being careful not to cross the "activation threshold" for strategic nuclear forces.<sup>106</sup> Several conditions are identified as justifications for crossing the nuclear threshold:

The conditions for using non-strategic nuclear weapons can be as follows: enemy use of mass destruction weapons or reliable discovery of his preparation for their use; destruction of our strategic weapons, above

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<sup>103</sup> Major-General V. I. Levshin, Colonel A. V. Nedelin, and Colonel M. Ye. Sosnovskiy, "Use of Nuclear Weapons to De-escalate Military Operations," *Voyennaya Mysl*, Moscow, May-June 1999. FBIS translated text.

<sup>104</sup> Igor Nikolaychuk, "First Strike Remains Important Element of Modern Nuclear Policy," *Yadernyy Kontrol*, Moscow, July-August 1999. FBIS translated text.

<sup>105</sup> Felgenhauer, *Russian Military Reform: Ten Years of Failure*, 1997, 36.

<sup>106</sup> Krugolov, Col. V.V. and Sosnovsky, Col. M. Ye. "Nonstrategic Weapons in Nuclear Deterrence," *Voyennaya Mysl*, Moscow, September 1999. FBIS translated text.

all nuclear weapons, and also important economic installations (atomic electric power stations, hydroelectric stations, major enterprises of the chemical and military industry, the most important transportation hubs) by enemy conventional weapons; appearance of a threat of disturbance of stability of a strategic defense in the presence of a large-scale enemy invasion.<sup>107</sup>

Strikes by non-strategic nuclear forces would then be made at five different levels of escalation, ranging from demonstrations of will all the way up to full-scale strategic nuclear war.<sup>108</sup> It is candidly admitted that if the final scale of escalation were reached, the deterrence and de-escalation missions would have failed.

These discussions about the possible operational uses of non-strategic weapons exemplify Sokov's "maximalist" camp. This school of thought regards nuclear weapons as useful for expanded deterrence in contingencies down to the level of regional war. As three Russian colonels recently stated in *Voyennaya Mysl*:

In our view, strategic stability can be ensured *at a global level* chiefly by strategic nuclear forces and *at a regional level* by non-strategic nuclear forces equipped with operational-tactical nuclear weapons, together with general-purpose forces and, if necessary, with the air component of the strategic nuclear forces.<sup>109</sup>

The fact that many in the Russian military and media have begun to talk more openly about tactical nuclear use indicates that the traditional taboo against the operational employment of such weapons, to the extent it exerted some influence in Russia, has begun to weaken. After observing the effects of the modern long-range precision-guided munitions employed by the United States in Iraq and Kosovo, many Russians contend that the distinction between these weapons and low-yield nuclear

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Colonel V. A. Ivasik, Colonel A. S. Pisyaukov, and Colonel A. L. Khryapin, "Discussion Forum: Nuclear Weapons and Russia's Military Security," *Voyennaya Mysl*, Moscow, July-August 1999. FBIS translated text; emphasis in original.

weapons has been blurred. They see the disarming effects of these weapons on critical command and communications nodes as analogous to the damage that could be caused by limited nuclear strikes.<sup>110</sup>

There have also been discussions in Russia regarding the creation of nuclear forces that would be more operationally useful in non-strategic missions. During an April 1999 meeting of the Russian Federation Security Council, it has been reported, the Ministry of Atomic Energy was directed to draw up plans to build up to 10,000 of a new generation of low-yield nuclear weapons. These weapons would ostensibly enable Russia to project power with limited strikes in much the same way that United States is able to use its precision conventional munitions.<sup>111</sup> The proposal, originally championed by Viktor Mikhailov, then the Minister of Atomic Energy, called for a generation of nuclear weapons that would explode with yields between .05 and .10 kilotons.<sup>112</sup> Also, the warheads on strategic nuclear missiles reportedly will be modified so that they will have a similar low-yield option that could be changed back to the normal yield if necessary. Mikhailov reportedly believes that the creation of such weapons would make the use of nuclear pressure more effective, since these weapons would not cause mass collateral damage and could therefore be used with less compunction.<sup>113</sup> It should be noted that this story was released during NATO's air campaign over Kosovo and may have been released as a political gesture rather than because of its existence as a real

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<sup>110</sup> David Hoffman, "Russia Laments Lost Power; Victory Highlights Superiority of NATO Weapons," *The Washington Post*, 12 June 1999, A1. Available through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>111</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, "Balkan War Prompts Strategic Rethinking in Moscow," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, 23 June 1999. Available through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. By comparison, the Hiroshima bomb had a yield of approximately 15 kt. See also Alexander Shirokorad, "Small Bombs for a Small War," *Armament and Military Technology, A Weekly Supplement to Defense and Security*, 8 July 1998. Available through Lexis-Nexis.

option. Such a program would be expensive and (if actually pursued and made public) might be damaging to Russia's international standing.

There has also been a call for the redevelopment of Russian IRBM capabilities by Sergei Brezkun, a senior Russian nuclear scientist. Such a capability is seen as an option to give Russia a better regional nuclear deterrent against hostile NATO actions. The proposal equates non-strategic nuclear forces with NATO's long-range PGM capabilities. According to Brezkun,

It can be asserted with a high degree of confidence that the appearance of new reproduced Pioneer (SS-20) IRBMs (or other IRBMs) in the Russian Federation armed forces can lead to a radical change in the psychology of the leadership of NATO countries with respect to ideas of bloc enlargement and so on.<sup>114</sup>

As with the reported proposal for very low yield nuclear weapons, this proposal would face obvious economic and diplomatic obstacles (including the abandonment of the INF Treaty) if it were seriously pursued.

What are the chances of these new doctrines actually being put to use in operational contingencies? If one takes seriously Russian statements and the new military doctrine, some troubling trends emerge. Proponents of the operational use of tactical nuclear weapons emphasize the objective of escalation control. At the same time, the military doctrine names escalation and expansion of warfare as basic features of modern war.<sup>115</sup> This view is shared by prominent Russian military thinkers.<sup>116</sup> Also, the importance of being dominant in the initial period of war is emphasized. Russia's dependence on nuclear weapons to achieve erstwhile conventional tasks should be

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Sergei Brezkun, "Pioneers Must be Revived: Russia Needs a New 'European' Nuclear Weapon," *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, Moscow, 13-19 August 1999, FBIS translated text.



recalled, as well as the fact that achievement of this dominance in the initial period of war is likely to escalate a conflict to the nuclear level quickly. In other words, the two purposes stated for the early employment of tactical nuclear weapons (escalation control and initial period dominance) are dangerously contradictory.

Where are the flashpoints where these contradictions may constitute more than an academic exercise? The issue of NATO expansion usually prompts particularly harsh Russian rhetoric. Some Russians have argued that Moscow should station nuclear weapons in the Kaliningrad Oblast to counter NATO expansion into Poland.<sup>117</sup> Some Russian commentators have also claimed that, due to NATO expansion, any future European war would go nuclear "in a matter of hours."<sup>118</sup> Other Russian observers have suggested that Russia will stop dismantling its tactical nuclear weapons in response to NATO developing closer ties with the Baltic States.<sup>119</sup> These dire predictions have become somewhat commonplace in Russian commentary on NATO, particularly in light of the prospects for continued eastward expansion and NATO actions against Serbia. However, a realistic look at the situation in Europe shows that a military confrontation between Russia and NATO is unlikely in the foreseeable future, given Russia's continued internal troubles. However, it would be imprudent to exclude the possibility of such a confrontation, because a Russian government burdened with internal problems might in a mood of desperation seek national unity and cohesion by initiating an international crisis.

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<sup>115</sup> Russian Military Doctrine, 2000, Section II, Paragraph 3.

<sup>116</sup> Gareev, 1998, 76.

<sup>117</sup> Yost, 1999, 22.

<sup>118</sup> Felgenhauer, *Segodnya*, 1997.

<sup>119</sup> "More Rigid Nuclear Policy Seen as Russia's Possible Reaction to US-Baltic Charter," Baltic News Service, 16 January 1998. Available through Lexis-Nexis.

The picture in the Caucasus is not so rosy. In September 1999, Russia launched the Second Chechen War. Some commentators in Russia have called for the use of nuclear weapons in Chechnya, although nothing this drastic has been officially threatened.<sup>120</sup> This could change if Russia again faced military defeat as in 1996. Some Russian generals have said that they will not obey any orders from Moscow that stop short of achieving absolute victory.<sup>121</sup> If faced with imminent defeat, Vladimir Putin, who has staked his credibility on handling the Chechen problem, might turn to desperate measures to salvage victory. Aside from Chechnya, there are simmering tensions in the Russian Federation in the regions of North Ossetia, Ingushetia, and Dagestan. In the Caucasian "Near Abroad," Russia has been trying to perpetuate its hegemony, and has had its hands in the Armenian-Azeri Nagorno-Karabakh war, and in the Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatist movements in Georgia. Currently, neither Turkey nor Iran has the wherewithal to challenge Russian influence in the region. If Russia continues to weaken, they may see an opening, given their perception of Russian weakness. Russia might then be driven to move in to reassert itself, and this could lead to a military confrontation that might in some circumstances involve nuclear threats or even actual operational employment of nuclear weapons.

Could Russia's leaders ever actually seriously contemplate the use of nuclear weapons in a contingency in which Russia's very existence was not at risk? Recent statements by Russian officials appear to be intended to reassure the world that Russia is not about to recklessly employ nuclear weapons. In December 1999 First Deputy Chief of

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<sup>120</sup> Filipov, David, "Russia Pounds Chechnya Capital," *The Boston Globe*, 25 September 1999, A1. Available through Lexis-Nexis, and Andrei Piontkovsky, "Russia Goes Nuclear Over Chechnya,"

the General Staff General Valeri Manilov declared that "Nuclear arms can only be used if an armed aggression is launched against Russia...If there is no aggression, nuclear arms won't be used."<sup>122</sup> In February 2000 Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov stated that "Russia is not threatening anyone and does not intend to use its nuclear forces to bring pressure."<sup>123</sup>

Alexei Arbatov acknowledged in 1997 that Russia's use of nuclear weapons in any contingency would be "suicidal" because of NATO's overwhelming conventional and nuclear superiority. He expressed the fear that members of the General Staff do not think "in such rational terms."<sup>124</sup> The fact that such matters are openly discussed in Russian military circles is cause for alarm. If nuclear weapons use is thought to be a real option in peacetime discussions, the chance is greater that this will be seen as a viable option in crisis conditions.

## F. CONCLUSION

Russia faces a widening gap between its ambitions and its capabilities. Its conventional military forces are in disarray, with little prospect of imminent improvement. Attempts at military reform have met with little success due to political disagreements and Russia's continuing economic crisis. At the same time, many Russians still consider their country to be a great power. The only way to preserve this status in military terms is to rely on the nuclear arsenal that Russia inherited from the Soviet Union. Because of Russia's conventional military weakness, the role of nuclear

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*Jamestown Foundation Prism*, Vol. 5, Issue 17, 24 September 1999. This would obviously be a self-destructive course of action for Russia to follow.

<sup>121</sup> "Who's in charge?" *The Economist*, 13-19 November 1999, 56.

<sup>122</sup> "Russia To Resort to Nuclear Arms Only in Emergency," Interfax, Moscow, 15 December 1999. FBIS transcribed text.

<sup>123</sup> "Russia's Ivanov says new nuclear doctrine threatens no one," *AFX European Focus*, 8 February 2000. Available through Lexis-Nexis.

forces has been expanded to include contingencies that would have been handled with conventional military power in the past.

Russia's doctrinal declarations about its lowered nuclear threshold are not in themselves especially alarming. Today, Russia is faced with a military situation similar to that which prompted NATO to adopt its flexible response doctrine. Russia cannot hope to challenge NATO in conventional military terms and judges that it must therefore depend on its first-use nuclear weapons policy to deter conventional attacks. The discussions among Russian military officers and commentators about the drastically lowered nuclear threshold are the real cause for alarm. These officers were trained under Soviet doctrine that called for the efficacious use of nuclear weapons at various stages of warfare. Although current Russian thought is not beholden to the Marxist-Leninist ideology of Soviet times, the belief in the practicality of waging a nuclear war appears to have survived, at least in key military circles.

Russia remains politically unstable. Vladimir Putin, although popularly elected, still remains a mystery. The chances of Russia seeking a military confrontation are low. However, Putin faces situations in the Caucasus, including Chechnya, that are still unsettled. If Russia became involved militarily in a large-scale Caucasian conflict, and that effort became a quagmire, Putin might feel compelled politically to take drastic measures in order to reverse the situation. In such a contingency, some of his advisors might argue that the use of nuclear weapons would be a realistic option. How such

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<sup>124</sup> Alexei Arbatov, *Russian Military Doctrine and Strategic Nuclear Forces to the Year 2000 and Beyond*, presented at the conference Russian Defense Policy Towards the Year 2000, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 26-27 March 1997, 5.

circumstances could arise in the turbulent Caucasus region is considered in the next chapter.

## **IV: POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC DYNAMICS INVOLVING RUSSIA IN THE CAUCASUS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caucasus region has been an area of continual strife and discord. The sudden disappearance of authority from Moscow, when added to the mix of ancient ethnic rivalries and modern geopolitical ambitions, has served to fuel conflict in the region. Russia has declared the region to be of vital security importance as part of the "Near Abroad" of former Soviet republics. The region also figures prominently in the security concerns of both Turkey and Iran. Russia has repeatedly tried to assert its influence in the region, in matters both internal and external to the Russian Federation. The most glaring examples are the two Chechen wars, the first in 1994-96, and the second underway since September 1999. The disastrous end to the first war had profound effects on Russian military and political power. The collapse of the Russian military's conventional fighting capability has led to an increased reliance on nuclear arms, and it is not inconceivable that these could be employed in the region. Given both this fact and the general instability of the region, the question of Russian interventionism has become a troubling one for NATO, partly because of the risk that a conflict in the Caucasus could bring Turkey and Russia into conflict.

This chapter examines the evolution of Russian policies in the Caucasus since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Regional and competing external strategic interests are examined as potential sources of future conflict. Contingencies that could bring Russia into further military operations in the region are also explored. Finally, the chapter considers how these future scenarios could involve the use of nuclear weapons.

## B. THE SOVIET COLLAPSE AND THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

The Caucasus did not share in the benefits of autonomy under Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* that had come to regions such as the Baltic states and Central Asia. Nationalist sentiment was brutally put down in Georgia in April 1989 and in Azerbaijan in January 1990. Public attitudes in Armenia were less anti-Moscow, as Yerevan hoped to use Moscow's influence to reach a favorable resolution of the ongoing struggle in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>125</sup>

On 19 August 1991, a group of conservative officials launched a coup against Mikhail Gorbachev that had the goal of reversing many of the liberal policies that had, in their eyes, brought the Soviet Union to the brink of disintegration. Within four days the abortive coup collapsed from lack of popular and military support. This episode sent the Soviet Union into its final death throes. The main impetus behind popular resistance to the coup was the leader of the Russian Federated Soviet Republic, Boris Yeltsin. In many respects, Yeltsin staged the real coup, as he assumed effective control even though Gorbachev was nominally returned to power.<sup>126</sup> In order to complete the change, Yeltsin proposed the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It appears that during these hasty maneuvers little serious planning was done to decide what exactly would replace the Soviet power structures.

In place of the Soviet structure, Yeltsin proposed the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The exact nature of this new organization was unclear from the beginning, as only a loose framework was established. The CIS

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<sup>125</sup> William E. Odom and Robert Dujarric, *Commonwealth or Empire? Russia, Central Asia and the Transcaucasus* (Indianapolis: Hudson Institute, 1995), 9.

originally was to include only the Slavic republics of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. Invitations were later extended to the rest of the former Soviet republics, but both Georgia and Azerbaijan initially refused to join. Misunderstandings were prevalent from the beginning. Conservative officials, especially those in the military, thought that the CIS represented a change in name only, rather than a fundamental upheaval of the old Soviet structures.<sup>127</sup> Russian policy towards the CIS has fluctuated; it was initially ambivalent, and then became more assertive.

In the Caucasus the CIS became a tool to guarantee Russian influence over the region. When a suitable institutional framework failed to take shape, Russia responded by using bilateral agreements throughout the CIS to preserve political and economic hegemony. Moscow also resorted to more underhanded tactics to facilitate the accession of Caucasian states to the CIS. In Georgia, Russia sought to play off separatist elements in Abkhazia against the new government. Azerbaijan alarmed Russia by strengthening its links to Turkey and by threatening to cut Russia off from deals involving the lucrative Azeri oil industry. Moscow supported a coup by a military dissident and the installation of a new pro-Russian government in Baku. Both Georgia and Azerbaijan bowed to Russian pressure and joined the CIS.<sup>128</sup>

The CIS has been hampered from its beginnings by the divergent conceptions of its purposes among its members. It did not develop into an all-encompassing Eurasian super-state or into a multi-purpose "variable geometry" entity in the spirit of the European Union. As was mentioned, the states of the Caucasus joined the organization

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 12.



because of either a beneficial relationship with Moscow or outright coercion by Russia. As for the other states of the former Soviet Union, their participation in the CIS also varied. The Baltic states, the most independence-minded and Westward-looking of the successor states even under Soviet rule, did not join. Belarus has lacked any historical inclination for independence and thus has sought to become as close as possible with Russia. For Minsk, the CIS represented an attractive vehicle; under strong Russian leadership Belarus could benefit from Russian economic and political patronage. The fact that Belarus has continued to follow this course, despite the disastrous state of affairs in Russia, speaks volumes about the miserable time that Belarus has had since 1991. Similar circumstances have prevailed in much of Central Asia, where independence came as an "unsolicited gift"<sup>129</sup> to several states in the region. These states all had sizeable Russian minority populations and lacked independent national military and economic institutions. Like Belarus, they had much to gain from Russian patronage.

The largest and most important of the non-Russian successor states is Ukraine. Its support for the CIS has been qualified at best, because its leaders have always been mindful of guarding its newly acquired independence. There are several reasons for this. First, and most importantly, Ukraine has the potential to become a more significant power, given its huge industrial and agricultural possibilities, with a landmass and population roughly equivalent in size to those of France.<sup>130</sup> Second, despite centuries of Russian and then Soviet rule, Ukrainian nationalism has been preserved. While there are regional variations in this respect, many Ukrainians are naturally suspicious of any

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<sup>129</sup> Mark Webber, *The International Politics of Russia and the Successor States* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 96.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

further Russian meddling in their affairs. Two post-Soviet issues are emblematic of this. The first is the issue of the Crimean Peninsula. Geographically within Ukraine, it had traditionally been ruled by Russia until it was "given" to the Soviet Ukraine in 1954. The peninsula is home to an ethnic Russian majority population, further feeding the rhetoric of those in Russia who believe that control should revert back to Moscow from Ukraine.<sup>131</sup> The other main issue of contention has been control of the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet. The resolution of this issue has involved a long and complex process, which did nothing to help relations between the two powers.<sup>132</sup>

### C. COMPETING STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE CAUCASUS

#### 1. Armenia

Armenia is a Christian nation that has struggled for survival among Muslim neighbors since it was conquered by the Turks in 1453.<sup>133</sup> Since at least the seventeenth century, it has sought outside help in winning and guaranteeing its independence. This desire, combined with Russian imperial ambitions and antagonism towards the Ottoman Empire, brought it under Russian influence. As political controls were eased during Gorbachev's reforms, Armenia raised the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, a province largely populated by ethnic Armenians but under the political control of Azerbaijan. Armenia and Azerbaijan soon became involved in active conflict. This struggle provided an impetus for Armenian nationalism and independence, but it also had detrimental effects. It has complicated economic development in a nation lacking commercially attractive energy resources like Azerbaijan and has made Armenia beholden to Russia for its

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>132</sup> James Sherr, "Russia-Ukraine *Rapprochement*?: The Black Sea Fleet Accords," *Survival*, vol. 39, no.3, Autumn 1997.

<sup>133</sup> Odom and Dujarric, 1995, 74.

wellbeing. As a consequence, Moscow has been able to use its support as leverage in ensuring Armenian compliance with its wishes. Armenia has achieved its main strategic goal of survival, but has done so at the cost of giving up much of its autonomy and hopes for economic development.

## **2. Azerbaijan**

The development of Azeri strategic interests since 1991 has also been strongly influenced by external pressure from Russia. The Azeri Popular Front was formed as a nationalist faction in May 1989, and subsequently used the conflict in Armenia to its advantage in inflaming nationalist sentiment.<sup>134</sup> In January 1990, Soviet troops were sent into Baku to restore order. The situation was stabilized until after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when Popular Front forces, spurred on by the military's poor performance against Armenia, forced the parliament to dissolve. A Popular Front government under Elchibey came to power, promising to reverse the military situation. Elchibey moved to exploit Azerbaijan's oil reserves through deals with Western corporations and improved relations with Turkey, two moves that did not sit well in Moscow. As the military situation worsened in 1993, Elchibey became convinced that he was about to become the victim of a Russian-backed coup and struck a deal with the pro-Russian politician Gaidar Aliyev. After assuming power, Aliyev quickly reversed Elchibey's Westward-looking policies and moved closer to Moscow, acceding to Russia's demands that Azerbaijan join the CIS.<sup>135</sup> However, in December 1999, Azerbaijan announced that it would apply for

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 81. This episode certainly seems to confirm that Russia was again using underhanded means to further its interests in the region.

the status of "aspirant to membership" in NATO, signaling a shift in Azeri foreign policy away from Russia.<sup>136</sup>

Unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan is blessed by the presence of natural resources that give it a lucrative basis for economic development – substantial oil reserves in the Caspian Sea Basin. Elchibey initially began to look westward for ways to exploit these reserves, and this policy was only briefly interrupted when Aliyev took power. The main problem now is deciding over whose territory the oil pipeline will flow. Russia naturally favors a line that would flow over its territory with the Black Sea as the ultimate destination. Turkey is in favor of constructing a new line across the mountains, through Turkey to the Mediterranean. Because this is a major economic issue that involves states in addition to those in the region, the question of oil pipeline routes is a prominent possible source of future conflict in the region.<sup>137</sup>

### **3. Georgia**

Even before the end of the Soviet Union, Georgia was becoming a hotbed of conflict in the Caucasus. Soviet troops brutally put down demonstrations in Tbilisi in April 1989, and this served to inflame nationalist sentiment and harden attitudes against Moscow. After the nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia took over in October 1990, these passions were further inflamed. Fervent Georgian nationalism alarmed non-Georgian minority populations, and separatist movements sprung up in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia. Gamsakhurdia also angered Moscow by refusing to cooperate as a member of the new CIS. The rebellions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia became vehicles for Russian

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<sup>136</sup> "Azerbaijan Seeks NATO Aspirant Status," *Jamestown Foundation Monitor*, vol. 5, issue 237, 22 December 1999.

meddling in Georgian affairs.<sup>138</sup> Former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze took power in 1992 with the intention of stabilizing the situation, but the chaos worsened. Georgian forces suffered defeats in Abkhazia by Russian-backed forces. These defeats further destabilized the political situation as various factions began fighting. Russia was able to use its leverage over the chaos to force Georgia to accept both Russian military bases on its soil and CIS membership.

In exchange for giving up a measure of autonomy, Georgia has seen a more stable situation develop. Russia has put pressure on Abkhazia to come back into the fold.<sup>139</sup> The Ossetians still remain recalcitrant, however. Politics in Georgia still remains a violent business, as suggested by the multiple assassination attempts on Shevardnadze. Russian influence still pervades the country, even though Georgia has shown resistance to Russia's demands for passage over Georgian soil to fight the war in Chechnya.<sup>140</sup> Georgia's economy has also suffered greatly as a result of the violence, further complicating Georgia's efforts to establish its independence from Moscow. Shevardnadze has, however, expressed the hope that Georgia will eventually be accepted as a member of NATO.<sup>141</sup>

#### 4. Turkey

During the time of the Ottoman Empire, the Turks ruled parts of the Caucasus, competing with Russia and Iran. Turkish influence was, however, shut out by the

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<sup>137</sup> Jonathan Aves, "The Caucasus states: the regional security complex," *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia*, ed. by Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998), 186.

<sup>138</sup> Odom and Dujarric, 1995, 85.

<sup>139</sup> Aves, 1998, 184.

<sup>140</sup> "Russia loses," *The Economist*, 6-12 November 1999, 52.

<sup>141</sup> Aschot Manutscharian, "Shevardnadze Views German Aid, Possible NATO Entry," *Munich Focus*, 17 April 2000. FBIS translated text.

combination of Kamal Atatürk's reforms and the Bolshevik Revolution during World War I.<sup>142</sup> Of the three Soviet successor states in the Caucasus, Azerbaijan shares the most in common with Turkey. The historical experiences of the two peoples have diverged since the formation of the Soviet Union. Anatolian Turkey, which is of Sunni heritage, became secular and Westward-oriented. Azeris are of the Shia form of Islam, and their culture has been influenced by Iran.<sup>143</sup> Nevertheless, following the Soviet breakup, Azerbaijan and Turkey moved closer to one another for a time. Elçibey saw Turkey as a good partner and role model and sought closer economic relations. Following Elçibey's ouster, Aliyev moved closer to Russia and Iran, to the detriment of Turkish influence.<sup>144</sup>

Azerbaijan and Turkey have nonetheless remained in accord on the issue of building an oil pipeline leading from Baku on the Caspian Sea through the mountains to Ceyhan on the Anatolian Mediterranean coast. These efforts have been supported by the United States and other Western powers. Agreements reached in the spring of 2000 among Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan have improved the prospects for this pipeline's construction.<sup>145</sup> This has been a bone of contention with the Russians, who wish to see oil from the Caspian cross their territory and be loaded at Novorossiisk on the Black Sea.<sup>146</sup>

Turkey's relations with the other two states in the Caucasus have been somewhat different. Georgia and Turkey have had generally good relations, because Georgia has

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<sup>142</sup> Odom and Dujarric, 1995, 221.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>145</sup> Michael Lelyveld, "Pipeline Project Advances, Hurdles Remain," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2 May 2000.

<sup>146</sup> Gareth Winrow, *Turkey in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995), 44, and Michael Lelyveld, "Kremlin Determined to Stay in Race for Caspian Oil," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 11 February 2000.

seen Turkey as an alternative to Russia. However, Russia's campaign to subjugate Georgia to its wishes has included efforts to alienate Georgia from Turkey by raising fears in Orthodox Christian Georgia of Moslem Turkish influence. So long as Russia continues to exert hegemony over Georgia, it is unlikely that Turkey will play much of a role there.<sup>147</sup> On the other hand, Turkey's relations with Armenia have been understandably tense, owing in part to the continued conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan about Nagorno-Karabakh. Moreover, there still exists lingering resentment among Armenians about a reported Turkish massacre of Armenians in 1915. Although Turkey has not actively supported Azerbaijan in the conflict with Armenia, Turkey's refusal to acknowledge the 1915 incident as a massacre has poisoned relations between the two states.<sup>148</sup>

Some more extreme forces in Turkey and in the ethnically and culturally Turkic states of the Caucasus and Central Asia have called for the emergence of "Pan-Turkism". This concept in extreme form calls for all the peoples of Turkic origin to be united under one government. The Turkish government has distanced itself from such extreme rhetoric, as it undoubtedly causes alarm in a great number of capitals.<sup>149</sup> Turkey's interests in both the Caucasus and Central Asia remain great, however. Aside from the issue of the oil pipeline, Turkey is home to a sizeable Chechen population, making Turkey sensitive to developments in Chechnya.<sup>150</sup> Turkey's greatest interest is in regional stability, especially in the Caucasus. Any conflict there is bound to alarm Turkey, if only because it might create a refugee problem. As long as the Russians are

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<sup>147</sup> Odom and Dujarric, 1995, 221.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>149</sup> Winrow, 1995, 16.

able to assert their influence and secure some degree of order, Turkey will probably not become embroiled in a conflict there.

## **5. Iran**

Iran offers an alternative model of Islamic development, a social and political model distinct from that of Turkey. Since the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, Iran has been a dynamic nation, seeking to spread its fundamentalist Islamic revolution. This has naturally brought it into conflict with all other regimes in the region that wished to remain secular or to pursue their own conception of Islam. In pre-Soviet times, the Persians were involved in the Caucasus, much like the Ottomans.<sup>151</sup> Following the Soviet breakup, Iran sought to improve relations with Shia Azerbaijan, but Tehran's efforts to assert real influence were rejected by Elchibey. Aliyev, however, turned away from Turkey and improved ties with Iran. Russian hegemony has nonetheless prevented Iran from asserting any real influence. Like Turkey, Iran primarily has an interest in stability in the region. Any large conflicts are bound to have spillover effects, and Iran's governing elite would rather have a stable northern border so that it can deal with the internal cracks that are beginning to appear in the revolution.<sup>152</sup>

## **D. THE EVOLUTION OF RUSSIAN STRATEGIC DOCTRINE**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has been undergoing what can only be called a search for its national identity. This is understandable when one considers the magnitude of the loss that Russia suffered with the passing of the Soviet empire. If we recall that the Soviet Union was primarily a Russian-run affair, the end of the Soviet

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>151</sup> Odom and Dujarric, 1995, 236.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 237.



Union represented a step back of several centuries for Russian territorial conquest. Faced with this fact, Russians have had to ask themselves tough questions about how to proceed. Is Russia still a great power? Should Russia look to the West for cooperation, or for competition? Or do the major threats and opportunities lie to the south and the east? How should Russia deal with the former Soviet republics? The final answers that Russians provide to these questions will have much to do with determining the ultimate fate of the post-Soviet space. This brief survey attempts to encapsulate the evolution of Russia's strategic thinking, with a special focus on the Caucasus.

In the years since the end of the Soviet Union, Russia's foreign policy has undergone changes. The first part of the evolution to consider here is how Russia has come to define its national interests or national idea. Russians are looking at their national interests in two ways. The first is the "holistic" approach – that is, that each country has its own national destiny and mission to pursue. The second is the "positivist" approach that assumes that ultimately all states have the same interests in mind: survival, physical security, economic prosperity, ethnic identity, and so on.<sup>153</sup> Authoritarian regimes tend to gravitate towards the former approach, while mature democracies move towards the latter.<sup>154</sup> Russia has since 1991 hovered somewhere between these two political manifestations, at times becoming more like a mature democracy and at times reverting to authoritarian tendencies. Prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, the national idea of Russia was defined by the sacred nature of "Mother Russia."<sup>155</sup> During the Soviet period this religious idea was replaced with the radical secular idea of promoting world

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<sup>153</sup> Andrey Kortunov, "Russian National Interests: The State of Discussion," *Russia's Place in Europe: A Security Debate*, ed. by Kurt R. Spillman and Andreas Wenger (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 22.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

socialist revolution. That idea was unable to survive even until the end of the Soviet Union.

Now the question is whether the new idea will be that of the pre-Soviet period or that of a pragmatic liberal democracy. Since 1991 there has been an ebb and flow between these two ideas. The two competing philosophies are sometimes called those of the Atlanticists and the Eurasianists. During the 1990s, the influence of the Atlanticists has waned while that of the Eurasianists has increased. The first post-Soviet Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, was of the Atlanticist persuasion, and sought to orient Russian foreign policy towards cooperation with the West.<sup>156</sup> During this post-Cold War honeymoon period, hope was high for a successful Russian integration into a partnership with the West. Another important feature of Kozyrev's foreign policy was the lack of an active policy towards the "Near Abroad."<sup>157</sup>

This policy was of course not without opponents. Both communist and nationalist political forces were opposed to such a pro-West outlook. It is important to remember that, while Russia went through an extensive political liberalization in 1991-92, many old Soviet functionaries were still in positions of power.<sup>158</sup> Many of these functionaries still sought to maintain Russia's status as a great power. While they accepted the dismantling of the Soviet Union, they believed that Russia's security depended on maintaining dominance in the "Near Abroad" and on keeping a balance with the West and NATO.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Sergei B. Stankevich, "Toward a New 'National Idea,'" *Rethinking Russia's National Interests*, ed. by Stephen Sestanovich (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994), 27.

<sup>156</sup> Kortunov, 1999, 30.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 30.

Political tension grew between Yeltsin and the legislative branch throughout 1993 and reached its apogee with Yeltsin's violent crackdown in October of that year. Though many political conflicts stemmed from domestic problems, opposition to Kozyrev's West-oriented foreign policy was also growing. Following the crackdown, even Kozyrev seemed to be moving closer to the nationalist side of the spectrum, declaring the need to "defend Russian national interests at all costs."<sup>160</sup>

The emergence of Vladimir Zhirinovsky and his ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) also played a role in shifting Yeltsin's policies to the right. In December 1993, Zhirinovsky's LDP and other "red-brown" (neo-communist/fascist) parties were very successful in Duma elections.<sup>161</sup> Zhirinovsky espoused a particularly virulent form of Russian nationalism, calling for the "last drive to the south" to eliminate Russia's historical Islamic adversaries on its southern rim.<sup>162</sup> He portrayed Russia as a nation that had saved the West from Ottoman conquest, yet stood humiliated by an ungrateful Western civilization. In order to finally solve Russia's problems, and restore it to its former glories, "The Russian army will assemble for the last time for its southern campaign and will stop forever on the shores of the Indian Ocean."<sup>163</sup> Although the LDP garnered only marginal support in the December 1999 Russian Duma elections,<sup>164</sup> movements like the LDP served to push Yeltsin to the right.

This move to the right was evident in the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as Foreign Minister in 1995 and in his subsequent appointment as Prime Minister in 1998. Primakov was a longtime communist who had headed the KGB's successor agency, the

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<sup>160</sup> Kozyrev, quoted in *ibid.*, 34.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Wayne Allensworth, *The Russian Question* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 194.

Foreign Intelligence Service.<sup>165</sup> This signaled a major shift away from any pro-Western foreign policy, as Primakov was most familiar to Westerners for having been Gorbachev's personal envoy to Saddam Hussein during the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War. Hostility towards the West increased and has been more pronounced to this day. On issues such as NATO expansion and NATO's actions against the Serbs in Bosnia and Kosovo, Russia has been extremely critical of the West. Primakov's foreign policy was also more oriented towards the Near Abroad, especially the Caucasus region.

In 1999 Yeltsin appointed another former KGB officer, Vladimir Putin, as Prime Minister, and then made Putin his successor by naming him acting President on December 31, 1999. Putin has shown interest in pursuing a more businesslike relationship with the West,<sup>166</sup> but has staked his legitimacy on solving the Chechen problem.<sup>167</sup> Putin's actions have signaled that "great power" thinking is firmly entrenched in Russian foreign policy.

#### **E. RUSSIA-NATO RELATIONS**

Several developments over the past decade have demonstrated that Russia views NATO as a potential adversary. Many of NATO's actions since 1991 have been met by a negative perception in Russia. These Alliance actions have led to a growing distrust of NATO among many Russians and to a general worsening of Russia-NATO relations. Many Russians fear that the United States and its NATO allies have an agenda for the

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<sup>163</sup> Zhirinovsky, quoted in *ibid.*, 197.

<sup>164</sup> "Very like a bear," *The Economist*, 25 December 1999.

<sup>165</sup> Kortunov, 1999, 38.

<sup>166</sup> "A new foreign policy?" *The Economist*, 22 April 2000.

<sup>167</sup> Henry Plater-Zyberk, *Can Vladimir Putin Save Russia?* Conflict Studies Research Centre Paper OB73, January 2000.

subjugation of Russia.<sup>168</sup> The main areas of contention between NATO and Russia include NATO's continued existence and purposes, NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), NATO's enlargement process, interpretations of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, and the NATO intervention in Kosovo.<sup>169</sup>

NATO is generally viewed by Russian political elites as an organization aligned against Russia. This view applies both to the Alliance's traditional collective defense mission and to its recently acquired collective security tasks. It is probable that some Russians see benefits in the Alliance's continued existence – for example, the strong U.S. presence benefits Russia by ensuring stability in European security affairs. However, given the dynamics of Russian politics, this view is unlikely to be openly espoused.<sup>170</sup>

The institutions for security cooperation that NATO has sought to advance, PfP and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), have also aroused a negative reaction from Moscow. PfP has been seen by Russians as a form of NATO "imperialism."<sup>171</sup> Russia has also resented the fact that in both PfP and the EAPC it is accorded no more importance than other East European states. Russia's participation in the EAPC and PfP has been less than enthusiastic because the success of these organizations lends credibility to NATO as the leading security organization for the Euro-Atlantic region. In the Russian view, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) should be the primary vehicle for dealing with European security challenges. According to the Russian Minister of Defense, Marshall Igor Segeyev,

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<sup>168</sup> For an example of the impetus for such Russian thinking, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, "A Geostrategy for Eurasia," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 76, no. 5, September-October 1997. In this article Brzezinski suggested that Russia might be divided into three states.

<sup>169</sup> David S. Yost, *Alternative Futures for NATO-Russia Relations*, April 2000, 2. Unpublished draft paper used with the permission of the author.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

In our view, NATO must be transformed into a political organization which would comprise one of the components of European security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This security architecture should be based on the OSCE, the only international organization on the continent that fully reflects the interests of all participating states in its activities and ensures that all have equal rights irrespective of their membership of various unions and alliances.<sup>172</sup>

These Russian attitudes are especially critical of NATO attempts to promote cooperative security arrangements in the Caucasus, as PfP and the EAPC are the major vehicles that NATO has used to attempt to influence events in the region.<sup>173</sup>

NATO's enlargement to include former Warsaw Pact members Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic has also been a major area of disagreement between Russia and the Alliance. On this issue there seems to be a near consensus among Russian officials and commentators. Russia is opposed to the enlargement that has already taken place, and objects to any further enlargement, especially into the Baltic states. It appears that even the "pro-Westernizers" in Russia, in the words of Russian scholar Tatiana Parkhalina, "do not dare speak out openly on their position with regard to NATO enlargement" because they fear losing political support.<sup>174</sup> Other Russians see NATO's enlargement as evidence that the West has reneged on promises not to take advantage of Russian weakness. Many Russians maintain that there was a "gentlemen's agreement" between the Soviet leadership and the United States in 1990 to the effect that NATO would not expand beyond a united Germany. This claim is denied by former U.S.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>172</sup> Marshal Igor Sergeyev, "We are not adversaries, we are partners," *NATO Review*, vol. 46, no. 1, Spring 1998.

<sup>173</sup> Pol De Witte, "Fostering stability and security in the Southern Caucasus," *NATO Review*, vol. 47, no.1, Spring 1998.

<sup>174</sup> Tatiana Parkhalina, "Of myths and illusions: Russian perceptions of NATO enlargement," *NATO Review*, vol. 45, no. 3, May-June 1997.

Secretary of State James Baker.<sup>175</sup> In the minds of many Russians, the enlargement of NATO is an attempt by the United States and its allies to extend their sphere of influence at Russia's expense.<sup>176</sup>

Russia's interpretation of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act is also a source of tension between Russia and the Alliance. Russians tend to see the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) as a body that should give Russia the right of co-decision with NATO regarding security issues. In 1997 President Boris Yeltsin said that he expected that the PJC would serve as a body in which Russia would make "consensus" decisions with NATO.<sup>177</sup> This expectation was contrary to the explicit statements of Western officials that the PJC would serve solely as a vehicle for consultations with Russia. For example, U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen stated in April 1997 that "Russia will have a voice but not a veto."<sup>178</sup> Though Moscow has had these expectations of having a vote in NATO decision making, its actual behavior in PJC deliberations has often been uncooperative.<sup>179</sup>

NATO's intervention in the Kosovo conflict under Operation Allied Force in the spring of 1999 brought relations between the Alliance and Russia to their lowest post-Cold War ebb. This intervention confirmed many Russians' worst fears about NATO's post-Cold War intentions and purposes. NATO showed its willingness to use military force in a non-Article 5 contingency without Russia's concurrence in a UN Security Council resolution explicitly authorizing the use of force. It demonstrated to Russians

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<sup>175</sup> David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998), 133-134.

<sup>176</sup> Yost, *Alternative Futures for NATO-Russia Relations*, 2000, 8.

<sup>177</sup> Yeltsin, quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Cohen, quoted in *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

the dilemma that they faced in dealing with NATO. In the words of Anatol Lieven, a British expert on Russian affairs, "The United States has made Russia a geopolitical offer that she cannot accept – and cannot refuse: that of a subordinate place in an American-dominated Eurasian security system."<sup>180</sup> Russia responded to NATO's intervention by suspending its participation in the PJC and in PfP and by suspending its military to military contacts with NATO countries.<sup>181</sup> Russia did participate in the eventual settlement and peacekeeping arrangements in Kosovo, but tried to make the resumption of its participation in the PJC contingent on the Alliance accepting Russia's interpretation of the Founding Act. This demand was dropped in February 2000 and a regular meeting of the PJC was held on 15 March 2000.<sup>182</sup>

It remains to be seen if Putin's government will continue to seek post-Kosovo improvements in Russia-NATO relations. Russia is still opposed to any further NATO enlargement and would almost certainly be opposed to any future NATO Kosovo-type operation conducted without its concurrence. Russia did ratify the START II arms-reduction agreement and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in April 2000, but it remains opposed to attempts by the United States to amend the 1972 ABM Treaty to facilitate the deployment of a limited U.S. National Missile Defense (NMD) system. In general Russia is opposed to any measures that would grant legitimacy to what Russia sees as U.S. aspirations to gain "unipolar" hegemony. As long as Russia views NATO as a tool of American hegemony in Eurasia, real progress in Russia-NATO relations will be difficult.

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<sup>180</sup> Anatol Lieven, "Ham-Fisted Hegemon, The Clinton Administration and Russia," *Current History*, vol. 98, no. 630, October 1999, p. 307

<sup>181</sup> Yost, *Alternative Futures for NATO-Russia Relations*, 2000, 10.



## F. RUSSIAN INTERESTS IN THE CAUCASUS

Russia's interests in the Caucasus are long-standing. From the late sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, Russia sought to expand its imperial influence over the region. By the outbreak of World War I, some liberalization had taken place, and nationalist groups were beginning to stir. Following the collapse of the Russian empire in 1917-1918, the three Caucasian nations declared independence. They were, however, subjugated by the Red Army and brought into the Soviet Union by 1921.<sup>183</sup> The Soviet leadership effectively used divide-and-rule tactics against nationalist uprisings in the "autonomous" republics in the North Caucasus and in the three Caucasian republics.<sup>184</sup> When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Caucasian republics became independent. As the power of the Russian state has weakened, autonomous regions of the Russian Federation such as Chechnya, Dagestan, North Ossetia and Ingushetia have become areas of conflict. Russia's dealings with the North Caucasian areas of the Russian Federation and with the Caucasian "Near Abroad" states are two distinct, although interrelated, areas of concern.

### 1. Caucasian "Near Abroad"

As already discussed, the Russian process of dealing with the Caucasian successor states has included coercion and interference. Russia used separatist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to exert leverage on Georgia and bring it into the Russian sphere of influence. In Azerbaijan, Russia used the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Armenia to force the independent-minded Elchibey from power and supplant him with Aliyev. Russia's policy has been to officially maintain the legally correct position of

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>183</sup> Paul B. Henze, *Russia and the Caucasus*, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1996, 5.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. As post-Soviet Russian dealings in the region suggest, the Russian *modus operandi* has not changed much in dealing with this area.

respecting sovereignty, while it pursues policies of subversion behind the scenes. Faced with the loss of its East European empire, it is attempting to establish a "Pax Russica" over the "Near Abroad."<sup>185</sup> Outside observers have criticized these actions as demonstrating a return to traditional Russian imperialism. If Russia is truly to be accepted as a modern, responsible nation, it must follow the rules of proper international behavior.

The response of Russians to these charges is that Russia's security depends on keeping close ties with the states on its borders, especially on the southern rim. Several rationales are often cited for this. One is the protection of ethnic Russians living abroad. Due to historical circumstances, all of the former Soviet states have some ethnic Russian inhabitants.<sup>186</sup> However, in none of the Caucasus states is this as large a factor as in the Baltic states or in Kazakhstan.<sup>187</sup> Some Russians also cite the "Islamic threat" as one that Russia must strive to contain on its borders. Although most people in this area are of the Muslim faith, there does not appear to be a real threat of Islamic fundamentalism anywhere in the region, despite the proximity to Iran.<sup>188</sup> Another rationale is the geopolitical one offered by Zhirinovsky – the supposed Turkish threat to the south. As discussed above, however, Turkey has neither the will nor the resources to seriously challenge Russian hegemony in the region.<sup>189</sup> There are also the emerging economic issues, particularly with regard to the exploitation of Caspian Sea oil resources. These

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<sup>185</sup> Mark Smith, *Pax Russica: Russia's Monroe Doctrine*, Whitehall Papers 21, London: The Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, 1993, 61.

<sup>186</sup> Sergo A. Mikoyan, "Russia, the US and Regional Conflict in Eurasia," *Survival*, vol.40, no.3, Autumn 1998, 123.

<sup>187</sup> Paul K. Baev, *Challenges and Options in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1997, 14.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

rationales, however implausible and incoherent they may seem to Westerners, are generally accepted across the political spectrum in Russia as valid arguments.<sup>190</sup>

Criticism from the West is decried as intended to humiliate Russia and keep it from its rightful place as a great power.<sup>191</sup>

## **2. Russia and the North Caucasus**

Soon after the establishment of the new Russian Federation in 1991, unrest began to show itself in the North Caucasus. The cauldron of this unrest has been Chechnya.<sup>192</sup> There has been a long history of conflict between the Russians and the Chechens, as Russia has sought to secure the North Caucasus against Islamic incursions. Seeing an opportunity with chaos reigning in Moscow, Chechen leader Dzhokar Dudayev declared the republic's independence from the Russian Federation in November 1991.<sup>193</sup> The central government proved unable to resolve the situation peacefully and embarked upon a military invasion in December 1994. The twenty months of war that culminated in a Russian defeat were disastrous for Russia as a military power. Moscow was unable to stabilize the region through force, and the defeat actually planted the seeds for further destabilization and conflict. This has been evident since the resumption of hostilities in Chechnya in September 1999. Russia's failure to subdue Chechnya despite the horrific destruction and suffering it has wrought undermines its claim to be a great power; and Moscow's methods raise questions about the wisdom of its statecraft.

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<sup>190</sup> Henze, 1996, 15.

<sup>191</sup> Mikoyan, 1998, 112.

<sup>192</sup> For an excellent narrative of the First Chechen War, see Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya, Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>193</sup> Tracey German, *Russia's Security Interest in the North Caucasus*, Conflict Studies Research Centre Paper P28, December 1998, 3.

Chechnya is not the only example of Russia's problems in dealing with its Caucasian territories. The neighboring autonomous republic of Dagestan was also a target for Russian military intervention in 1999. The other neighboring republics of Ingushetia and North Ossetia also present potential problems. All of these problems have been exacerbated by the complete ineptitude of the Russian government in making any political and economic progress in the region. The unrest in Chechnya and the rest of the North Caucasus represents a far more drastic strategic threat to Russia than any current foreign involvement in the Caucasian "Near Abroad." If Russia cannot control even territories nominally within its own borders, or make durable political settlements regarding these territories, the survival of the Russian Federation as a viable state is called into question. Moscow's inability to come to terms with these realities is a potentially dangerous source of future conflict brought on by Russian misperceptions and miscalculations.

#### **G. POSSIBLE NUCLEAR USE CONTINGENCIES IN THE CAUCASUS**

At least three possible contingencies for nuclear employment in a Caucasian conflict merit analytical attention. The first is the use of nuclear weapons on the territory of the Russian Federation in a conflict such as that in Chechnya. The second is the employment of nuclear arms in a war between Russia and one of the south Caucasian states. The third is a variation of the second with the added factor of Turkish involvement. A nuclear attack would not be brought about by accident or by a rogue general in any of these scenarios, but rather by the orders of Russia's political leadership.

In the first scenario, it is assumed that Russia might once again attempt to subdue a rebellious republic with conventional military force. This could occur in one of several

regions (Chechnya, Tatarstan, Ingushetia, Dagestan or North Ossetia). The war would follow a pattern similar to that of the First Chechen War of 1994-1996, with Russian forces becoming bogged down in a guerrilla environment. As casualties mounted without tangible movement toward victory, political and military leaders in Moscow would come under increasing pressure to bring the war to a conclusion. Political leaders desperate to save face would be unable to countenance a capitulation to the rebels, because this would undermine the regime and seriously call into question the viability of the Russian Federation as a political unit. The military would also be unwilling to accept defeat, because that would threaten its powerful position in the national security decision-making process. The combination of these factors would lead to a serious contemplation of a nuclear strike in an attempt to bring about a reversal of fortunes on the battlefield.

The Russians who have raised the idea of using nuclear weapons in Chechnya evidently fail to grasp how self-destructive this course would be.<sup>194</sup> Russia has become sensitive about international criticism of the conduct of its wars in Chechnya. The international outrage over the use of nuclear weapons would, however, make the current criticisms with regard to Russia's handling of the war in Chechnya seem trivial. The fact that such a strike would be conducted on Russian territory would hardly be popular with Russian citizens. Nevertheless, in the fall of 1999, there were some calls by commentators in Russia to carry out nuclear attacks in Chechnya.<sup>195</sup> However, no evidence has been found of such suggestions emanating from official sources.

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<sup>194</sup> For illustrations of Russian attitudes towards the possibilities of employing nuclear weapons in Chechnya see David Filipov, "Russia Pounds Chechnya Capital," *The Boston Globe*, 25 September 1999, A1. Available through Lexis-Nexis, and Andrei Piontkovsky, "Russia Goes Nuclear Over Chechnya," *Jamestown Foundation Prism*, Vol. 5, Issue 17, 24 September 1999.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

The second scenario would again involve a Russian incursion into the Caucasus that resulted in either military stalemate or defeat. This scenario is entirely plausible, according to Russian defense analyst Pavel Felgenhauer:

The Russian Army could easily suffer defeat in a local conflict in the Caucasus or Central Asia. The political and military consequences of such a defeat could prove wholly unacceptable to Russia, and a direct threat to use nuclear weapons or even a limited demonstration nuclear strike could for this reason suddenly become the last realistic possibility of winning or evening up a war that has been lost, although no one in Moscow is seriously planning such actions at this time, of course.<sup>196</sup>

As discussed above in this chapter, Russia could become militarily embroiled in several conflicts in the South Caucasus. This scenario would represent an escalation from the first scenario because it would involve an attack by Russia against another sovereign state. It would also entail the use of nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear state. One might assume that Russia's conventional forces, despite their weaknesses, would be able to prevail against Azerbaijan or Georgia. By this logic, Russia's forces should have had no trouble in sweeping through Chechnya in 1994-1996 and again in 1999-2000.

The third scenario would involve an even graver contingency. In this case, the circumstances of the second scenario would be repeated, with the addition of Turkey as a combatant. Any Russian attack against Turkey would be an attack against a NATO ally, and this would oblige the United States and the other Allies to honor the mutual-defense pledge in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. This scenario has perhaps threatened to become a reality. In 1992, when Azerbaijan seemed to be losing its quasi-war with

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<sup>196</sup> Felgenhauer, "The Russian Army and the East-West Military Balance: Self-deception and Mutual Misunderstanding Did Not End with the Cold War," *Segodnya*, 18 August 1995, extracts published in *The National Interest*, Winter 1995-96, quoted in Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 1998, 86.

Russian-backed Armenia, Turkey threatened to intervene on Azerbaijan's behalf. Russian Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, commander of the nuclear forces of the CIS, warned that, "If there is military interference by another party, that will obviously place us on the verge of a Third World War."<sup>197</sup> These threats forced Turkey to back down. They demonstrated that Russia could make dramatic threats to prevent any outside military intervention in the "Near Abroad."

The nuclear implications of such a scenario were discussed by Pavel Felgenhauer soon after the actual crisis had passed. In his scenario, Russia, hopelessly outclassed by Turkish land and air power, would be forced to turn to a nuclear demonstration to prevent defeat. Russia would make a demonstration nuclear strike against a U.S. radar station in Turkey to prove its resolve. Further strikes would be threatened, and the United States would be forced to negotiate a settlement favorable to Russia. Because of Felgenhauer's reputation as an authoritative expert, owing in part to his contacts within the Russian military, some Western observers suspect that his article was intended as a message to Turkey (and to NATO as a whole) regarding the possible consequences of any Turkish military involvement in the Caucasus.<sup>198</sup>

This scenario would be truly the most dangerous because a Russian attack against Turkey would almost certainly require a defensive response by NATO. It would mean that deterrence had failed from two perspectives. From Russia's standpoint, its military posture, including its nuclear arsenal, would have failed to deter Turkish involvement in

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<sup>197</sup> "Spokesman, Chief of Staff React to Shaposhnikov Statement," Ankara TRT Television Network, 21 May 1992, FBIS translation, quoted in Pry, *War Scare*, 1999, 118. See also Stephen J. Blank, *Energy and Security in Transcaucasia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 7 September 1994), p. 8.

<sup>198</sup> Felgenhauer, "Caucasian War at Center of World Policy in the Year 2000," *Segodnya*, 4 January 1994, FBIS translation, quoted in Pry, 125-126.

the "Near Abroad" that Moscow considers its sphere of influence. From NATO's perspective, it would mean that its collective defense posture had failed to deter an attack against a member of the Alliance.

## **H. CONCLUSION: PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE CONFLICT**

The Caucasus presents the greatest danger for major conflict in the former Soviet Union. Throughout its history this region has served as a battleground for competing imperial interests. It serves as an interface between Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Since 1991, the nations of the region have tried to assert their independence, only to be subjected to renewed Russian efforts to re-impose hegemony. Russia has tried to couch its interference in the region in terms of legitimate interests, but its actions have often been undertaken in an underhanded fashion. Russia does indeed have a great national security interest in stability on its southern borders. However, Russia, mainly because of its own dismal performance in reforming its political and economic institutions, has been unable to formulate a respectful and mutually beneficial strategy for dealing with the region. It has failed to respect the sovereignty of internationally recognized states and has used brutal means to put down insurrections within its own borders.

The 1994-1996 war in Chechnya was a watershed for Russia because it demonstrated just how far Russian power had declined. By resorting to force to subdue the Chechens, Moscow instead demonstrated that the use of the Russian military was no longer a viable option. The army that was once dreaded by the West was defeated and humiliated by lightly armed rebels. Since September 1999, Russia has been proceeding down the same road in Chechnya. Although no major defeats have been suffered so far, the outcome is still in doubt. The statements by some Russian military leaders that they



would ignore orders to pursue anything other than a complete victory give cause for concern.<sup>199</sup>

The ideal situation in the Caucasus would be one in which the sovereignty of all states is respected and security problems are solved through international cooperative security organizations. Given its continued great power ambitions, Russia is an obstacle to establishing this state of affairs. Russian imperialism in the Caucasus may nonetheless provide a measure of regional stability if overseen by a strong and viable Russia. Neither Turkey nor Iran, the two other regional powers, has the wherewithal to compete in the region in the face of Russian hegemony. A strong Russian presence discourages them from competing against Moscow and against each other. However, further decline in Russia may encourage them to move in an effort to fill the power vacuum.

The danger now is that Russia's capabilities to project power in the region increasingly do not match its desire to do so. Russia's conventional forces are in a decrepit state and are by all accounts growing worse. Judging by recent events in Chechnya and Dagestan, those in power in Moscow still consider the use of these forces a viable option, perhaps because Russian forces are numerically still much stronger than those of any state in the Caucasus. There are a number of conflicts in the Caucasus – including Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia in Georgia, and Ingushetia or Ossetia in Russia – that the Putin government may attempt to intervene in. This intervention could range from peacekeeping in permissive conditions to open combat. Given that Russia's conventional capabilities continue to erode, it is not difficult to conceive of a scenario in which Russia's leaders might feel backed into a corner and see nuclear weapons as the

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<sup>199</sup> "Who's in charge?" *The Economist*, 13-19 November 1999, 56.

only way out. If Turkey or Iran had also become embroiled in the region, Ankara or Tehran might be involved in the nuclear employment contingency. Such scenarios may continue to be a threat until Russia acquires the conventional means to exercise effective hegemony over the region, or until it decides that it no longer desires to do so.

## **V. CONCLUSION: NATO OPTIONS FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter examines measures that NATO might take to prevent the occurrence of the scenarios described in the previous chapter and the Alliance's possible responses should one of these scenarios nonetheless arise. For conflict prevention, the NATO allies might exploit the potential of multilateral cooperative security organizations such as Partnership for Peace, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United Nations, and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. These measures might be supplemented by confidence-building and arms-control measures between NATO and Russia. NATO must also maintain its commitment to nuclear deterrence to lessen the probability of a Russian operational employment of nuclear weapons in a Caucasian war.

If these prevention measures failed, NATO would be faced with unpleasant response options. It might consider responding militarily (and would be obliged to do so if Turkey was attacked), but would face the danger of further escalation. The Alliance would also have the diplomatic option of joining in expressions of outrage regarding Russia's behavior. Russia's operational employment of nuclear weapons would probably be a system-changing event that could lead to new calls for the abolition of nuclear weapons, and/or cause a return to a Cold War-type confrontation between Russia and the West.

### **B. NATO OPTIONS FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION**

The best way to keep any of the scenarios discussed in the previous chapter from coming to fruition is conflict prevention. If Russia does not become involved in active combat in the Caucasus, no reason to use nuclear weapons there will arise. The most

promising routes to conflict prevention include engagement and deterrence. An engagement strategy should use the existing frameworks for international security, including the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). The engagement strategy should also include continued contact with Russia through the aforementioned organizations, as well as in the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) and through national-level agreements between Russia and the United States. Arms control – perhaps including transparency measures – should continue to be a priority in relations with Russia, especially with regard to non-strategic nuclear weapons, since these are the weapons most likely to be employed in a Caucasian conflict. The Alliance must, however, keep in mind the difficulties in designing and verifying accords concerning these weapons.<sup>200</sup> These efforts must be integrated into a coherent strategy for promoting peace and stability in the Caucasus and for economic and political liberalization in Russia.

NATO's diplomatic security instruments have already been used to some extent in the South Caucasus. NATO Secretary General Javier Solana visited the region in 1997 and 1998. All three states – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – have become members of PfP and the EAPC. NATO and the three countries have cooperated on issues such as scientific research and civil emergency planning. In October 1998 Georgia hosted an EAPC regional security seminar. This seminar was a forum for discussion of a wide range of security issues, including defense resource management, multilateral

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<sup>200</sup> Yost, *The U.S. and Nuclear Deterrence in Europe*, 1999, pp. 49-55.

cooperation, and environmental cleanup. The goal of such measures in the Caucasus is to promote a degree of political stability so that economic reforms can bear fruit.<sup>201</sup>

There are practical limits to such diplomatic security measures, however. For example, Russia has been less than fully cooperative in its dealings with the NATO-sponsored EAPC and PfP. It is also relatively easy to discuss minor or non-controversial issues like those dealt with at the EAPC seminar. It is another matter entirely to effectively deal with security challenges that have the potential to lead to actual warfare, especially warfare involving Russia. A core theme in NATO's collective security rhetoric is that "security is indivisible." This reflects the Kantian-Wilsonian approach to collective security in which the international norms against war and aggression are so great that all the nations of the international community will seek to punish any nation that deviates from these norms.<sup>202</sup> This was the principle behind the failed League of Nations after World War I. The failure of the League illustrated that idealistic principles alone could not be depended upon to enforce peace. The United States' refusal to participate and the demoralization of France and Britain following the war were among the key factors that hindered any real enforcement.

At the conclusion of World War II, the United Nations was formed with the principle that collective security could only function on the basis of a consensus of major powers.<sup>203</sup> This principle was the basis for the five permanent members with veto powers on the UN Security Council. In practice collective security measures are undertaken with either explicit or implicit agreement among the major powers, as in the case of NATO's

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<sup>201</sup> De Witte, "Fostering stability and security in the Southern Caucasus," 1998.

<sup>202</sup> Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 1998, 17.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

intervention in the Bosnia conflict, or without such agreement, as in the case of NATO's intervention in the Kosovo conflict – an intervention that Russia did not endorse.<sup>204</sup>

It is this reality that may undermine NATO's efforts to promote international security in the Caucasus. If Russia is bent on being the sole arbiter of power in the region, achieving any major power consensus with Russia on regional security questions will be difficult. Any collective security measures in the region that do not have Russia's support may be doomed to failure. This is not to say that such measures are completely without merit. As discussed above, NATO's cooperative security initiatives have already produced some positive signs in the region. However, the complete success of these initiatives will always be contingent on Russia's participation and agreement.

Organs such as the NATO-Russia PJC can also serve as confidence-builders to reduce the mistrust between Russia and NATO. NATO enlargement has been one of the major sources of Russian mistrust towards the Alliance during the past several years. Russia must be convinced that, although the new members are joining a collective defense organization, the prime benefit of expansion is to enlarge the "zone of peace" and promote general European security. It must be shown that NATO is not striving to gain power at the expense of a weakened Russia. Judging by the reaction of Russians across the political spectrum to NATO expansion, these efforts have thus far met with little success.

A lessening of the danger can also be brought about through bilateral national-level contacts. Perhaps the most important of these are the negotiations regarding nuclear issues. Great efforts have already been made to reduce the chances of a false nuclear

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 18.

attack alarm in Russia leading to a retaliatory strike on the United States. Military-to-military contacts may help to advance the process of Russian military reform with the ultimate result of reducing Russian dependence on nuclear weapons. Arms control measures should also be pursued with the negotiation of a START III agreement and the revision of the ABM Treaty to accommodate the proposed U.S. National Missile Defense system.

Arms control must also at some point deal with Russian tactical nuclear weapons, as these are the most dangerous in terms of the prospect for their actual use, either sanctioned or unsanctioned. In December 1999 NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) repeated its call that Russia reduce its tactical nuclear stockpile.<sup>205</sup> Another option may be a formal arms control measure. Such an initiative could take the form of an air-delivered nuclear forces regime that would phase out nuclear gravity bombs delivered by tactical aircraft.<sup>206</sup> Such a measure would undoubtedly be difficult to negotiate, given the importance that Russia has attached to its non-strategic nuclear forces; but the concept warrants exploration. Furthermore, arms control alone cannot guarantee against the occurrence of the nuclear use contingencies outlined in the previous chapter. As long as Russia has ambitions for hegemony in the Caucasus but lacks the conventional forces to effectively achieve it, the danger of Moscow's use of nuclear weapons exists.

Therefore, it is imperative that NATO maintain its own commitment to nuclear deterrence. The Alliance's nuclear posture will be a factor in any Russian contemplation of nuclear first-use. The Alliance's posture should make clear to Russia the risks in any

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<sup>205</sup> Ministerial meeting of the Defense Planning Committee and the Nuclear Planning Group Final Communiqué, 2 December 1999, paragraph 9. Available at [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int)

decision by Moscow to employ its weapons, especially in a contingency involving Turkey. NATO's commitment to nuclear deterrence was upheld in the 1999 Strategic Concept:

The fundamental purpose of the nuclear forces of the Allies is political: to preserve peace and prevent coercion and any kind of war. They will continue to fulfil an essential role by ensuring uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor about the nature of the Allies' response to military aggression. They demonstrate that aggression of any kind is not a rational option. The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States; the independent nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies.<sup>207</sup>

However, in the autumn of 1998, Germany, under its new Social Democrat and Greens coalition, called for NATO to renounce nuclear first-use as an option. This proposal did not garner any support in the United States. As Secretary of Defense William Cohen stated,

It is an integral part of our strategic concept and we think it should remain exactly as it is. We think that the ambiguity involved in the issue of the use of nuclear weapons contributes to our own security, keeping any potential adversary who might use either chemical or biological weapons unsure of what our response would be.<sup>208</sup>

The German proposal did not gain support in the Alliance, and Germany signed on to the later statements of the NPG and the 1999 Strategic Concept reaffirming first-use as an option.<sup>209</sup>

It is widely agreed among officials and experts in NATO countries that a credible Alliance nuclear deterrence posture requires the continued basing of U.S. nuclear forces

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<sup>206</sup> Stephen P. Lambert and David A. Miller, *Russia's Crumbling Tactical Nuclear Weapons Complex: An Opportunity for Arms Control*, 1997, 15-28.

<sup>207</sup> NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept, paragraph 62. Available at [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>208</sup> Cohen quoted in Dana Priest and Walter Pincus, "U.S. Rejects 'No First Use' Atomic Policy; NATO Needs Strategic Option, Germany Told," *Washington Post*, 24 November 1998. Available on Lexis-Nexis.



in Europe to demonstrate the transatlantic commitment to extended deterrence and risk-sharing. However, several factors could undermine this posture, such as the "delegitimization" of the concept of deterrence due to a nuclear accident or actual operational use, political concerns with Russia, no-first-use pledges, and U.S. and European domestic political considerations.<sup>210</sup> U.S. nuclear disengagement from Europe could have dire consequences for the Alliance:

The withdrawal of a sense of U.S. protection could create incentives for some European states to seek nuclear weapons, or to form coalitions to compensate for the apparent disengagement of U.S. nuclear commitments. The sense that America was withdrawing from leadership responsibilities could stimulate competition for primacy among the larger European states.<sup>211</sup>

Such a disengagement by the United States could also lead Russians to question the Alliance's resolve and could in some circumstances cause them to calculate that they would not risk a NATO response by employing nuclear weapons in a Caucasian contingency.

In its relations with Russia, NATO faces the challenge of reconciling enlargement and the Alliance's commitment to nuclear deterrence with its confidence-building and collective security measures. Some Russians have been quick to exploit apparent contradictions in NATO policy. Russian Communist party leader Gennady Zyuganov said in 1998 that NATO's nuclear deterrence strategy should be "replaced by a philosophy of survival of humanity."<sup>212</sup> Operation Allied Force in the Kosovo conflict in the spring of 1999 greatly added to Moscow's distrust towards the West. Effectively

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<sup>209</sup> Yost, *The US and Nuclear Deterrence in Europe*, 1999, 67.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>212</sup> Zyuganov quoted in Andrei Urban, "Zyuganov Urges NATO to Drop Nuclear First Strike Doctrine," *Moscow ITAR-TASS*, 28 November 1998. FBIS Translated text.

proceeding along its twin paths of collective defense and collective security will likely be the greatest challenge that the Alliance will face in its relations with Russia in the coming years.

The success of any conflict prevention efforts will in the end depend largely on circumstances in Russia that are beyond the control of NATO. Ultimately, Russia must make the hard choices about how it interacts with other powers. Russian leaders must come to realize that the best hope for Russia to prosper is to concentrate on improving its domestic situation and to pursue a non-aggressive foreign policy, especially in the former Soviet space. Russia's leaders must come to realize that the risks of military adventurism and nuclear blackmail are too great to assume. The Alliance may hope to exert some positive influence as these decisions are reached. Collective security measures and engagement can help Russia see the benefits of good relations, while diplomatic warnings and a strong nuclear deterrent can help it see the risks of aggression and confrontation. The challenge for the United States and the other NATO allies is to ensure that the two strategies are not at cross purposes.

### **C. NATO RESPONSE OPTIONS GIVEN RUSSIAN NUCLEAR USE**

This section of the thesis examines the options that NATO would have in responding to each of the three scenarios and the larger consequences that might result from these scenarios. In the first scenario, a Russian nuclear use internal to the Russian Federation, NATO's response options would be rather limited. The Alliance would be unlikely to use force in response to a civil war in Russia. It is not clear what a NATO military intervention would be intended to achieve, even if the Allies could agree to conduct such an intervention, which is doubtful. Moreover, a NATO military

intervention in a civil war in Russia would be dangerous, given Russia's ability to threaten Europe and North America with its strategic nuclear arsenal.

The primary response by foreign nations to this eventuality would probably be outrage. If the Russians pursued such a course of action, the resultant anti-Russian diplomatic firestorm would probably be more intense than any international protest yet staged in the postwar world. Russia might become an international pariah, denounced in the United Nations and in the court of world opinion. NATO could sever all formal ties with Russia and resolve to further strengthen its own conventional and nuclear forces. The Allies that provide aid and assistance to Russia could cease to do so. It is not clear, however, that all Allies would deem this the most enlightened and far-sighted course of action, given the West's continuing incentives to cooperate with Russia in certain policy areas.

NATO's options in the second scenario are more difficult to formulate. It is safe to say that Russia would also in this case probably be the target of every known tool of diplomacy. In this scenario, however, Russia would have used nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear foreign state. There would be an instinct in the Alliance to keep the situation from escalating any further, while at the same time punishing Russia diplomatically. It is conceivable that Azerbaijan or Georgia would call for foreign military support, and that some of the Allies might favor intervening. Military intervention would, however, put the Alliance on very dangerous ground politically and militarily. Such a contingency would not warrant action under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, so a political consensus in support of intervention among the major powers of the Alliance would

likely be hard to reach. (An intervention could, however, be justified – hypothetically at least – under Article 51 of the UN Charter.)

Any NATO intervention would also carry with it the danger of further escalation. If Russia had already employed nuclear weapons once, it might well be willing to do so again. Russia might declare that any interference by outside forces would make those forces – and their homelands – targets for further nuclear attacks. It would be difficult to find a military response that did not carry the danger of further escalation.

The third scenario would imply even graver risks. In this scenario, the Russians would have badly miscalculated NATO's resolve. If Turkey was the target of a Russian nuclear attack, the Alliance would be obligated to respond under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. In order to maintain its credibility as an alliance, NATO would have to make an effective and appropriate response, not necessarily involving (but not conclusively excluding) NATO use of nuclear weapons. NATO's response would have the goal of restoring deterrence and the security and integrity of Turkish territory by demonstrating that the Alliance would not let such an attack go unpunished. NATO's main concerns would include controlling escalation, because such a tit-for-tat exchange could quickly go out of control. Questions regarding NATO's TNF policies that were never resolved during the Cold War – such as linkage to U.S. strategic forces; effectively conducting two-sided TNF engagements; and interpretations of Russian TNF policy<sup>213</sup> – might not receive satisfactory answers if NATO was faced with the prospect of using TNF in a conflict with Russia. A Russian nuclear attack against Turkey would be the most difficult test in the history of NATO.

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<sup>213</sup> Yost, "The History of NATO Theater Nuclear Force Policy," 1992, 248.

If any of these three scenarios were to occur, it would have a dramatic impact on world politics. The nuclear taboo would have been broken. It is quite conceivable that such an event (assuming that it did not escalate to a general war) could entail one of two completely different sets of consequences. On one hand, actual use of nuclear weapons could give rise to an overwhelming call to abolish nuclear arsenals once and for all. Those favoring abolition would see their position vindicated, as the existence of nuclear arsenals would not have prevented their use. Those claiming that nuclear weapons provide for stability and deterrence would have seen their position undermined. The revulsion of public opinion around the world to the events, including in Russia, might force the governments of the nuclear powers to seriously pursue nuclear disarmament.

On the other hand, such events could also conceivably cause a reaction completely at the other end of the spectrum. Public opinion in the West might react in horror to Russia's actions and demand that NATO take steps to ensure that such a scenario never arises again. The Alliance would seek to redefine its nuclear posture and strengthen its deterrent. There would be calls for increases in military spending and a modernization of U.S. nuclear forces, both strategic and tactical. American public opinion would demand the immediate deployment of an expanded NMD system that could completely shield the United States from any missile attack. The Europeans would probably also lose their aversion to missile defense. Since a Russian nuclear strike against an Ally would show that existing deterrence mechanisms had failed, the Alliance would seek to deter any further nuclear use by adopting an enhanced nuclear doctrine. Under this scenario, arms control negotiations would cease and Russia would become an international pariah. At this point, Russia could either become more aggressive or

undergo a regime change with the goal of reclaiming its status as a responsible and trustworthy power.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The threat of Russia using nuclear weapons in a regional contingency is a real, albeit unlikely, possibility. This analysis has focused on the Caucasus as the setting for such a scenario because it appears to be the region with the greatest potential for conflict. However, the options examined in this chapter for NATO to prevent or respond to such a contingency could be applied anywhere in the "Near Abroad." As long as Russia maintains hegemonic ambitions in these regions with a military dependent on nuclear weapons, the possibility that one of these fictional scenarios may become reality remains. The best option for NATO is to prevent conflict altogether by promoting cooperative security and engagement with Russia. However, the success of such efforts cannot be guaranteed.

Russia's ambitions and its conventional military weakness ensure that the threat of miscalculation regarding the operational and strategic utility of nuclear weapons is by no means trivial. There are sound political reasons for the Alliance not to publicly address such Russian threats. Doing so would lend them credibility and suggest to Moscow that they might be a useful tactic to employ. Confronting the Russians on the issue could also make Russia perceived as more of a threat in the eyes of Western public opinion. This could exacerbate the situation by reinforcing Russian fears of an American-led NATO that (according to the anxieties expressed by some Russians) has designs to subjugate Russia.

The problem is this: At what point might leaders in Moscow calculate that they could accomplish their objectives through the first use of nuclear weapons? The threat may not become apparent until Russia is involved in a failed adventure in the Caucasus or elsewhere. At this point, however, Russia's leaders might consider their situation desperate and see nuclear weapons as their only possible recourse.

Given the dangers of such an eventuality, NATO must maintain its robust nuclear deterrent and make clear to Russia that it would have nothing to gain from resorting to nuclear weapons use in a regional contingency. The Alliance must make Russia's leaders aware of the extremely detrimental effect that such actions would have on its standing in the world, as well as of the grim political and possible military consequences. These risks must be analyzed and faced squarely if they are to be successfully managed – by prevention, if possible, and by remedial action, if necessary.

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